BLUE BOOK

An Illus[illegible]agazine ~ January, 15 cents

"SHIPS and MEN," a new series *by* H. Bedford-Jones

"BEELZEBUB," a great novel *by* R. G. KIRK

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LATER
HEY CHARLIE–TAKE A SQUINT AT MY FACE– THAT FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST WORKED
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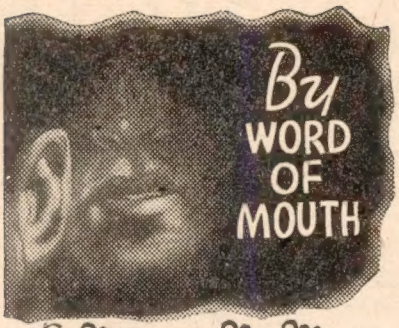

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By RICHARD WORMSER

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BLUE BOOK

JANUARY, 1937 MAGAZINE VOL. 64, NO. 3

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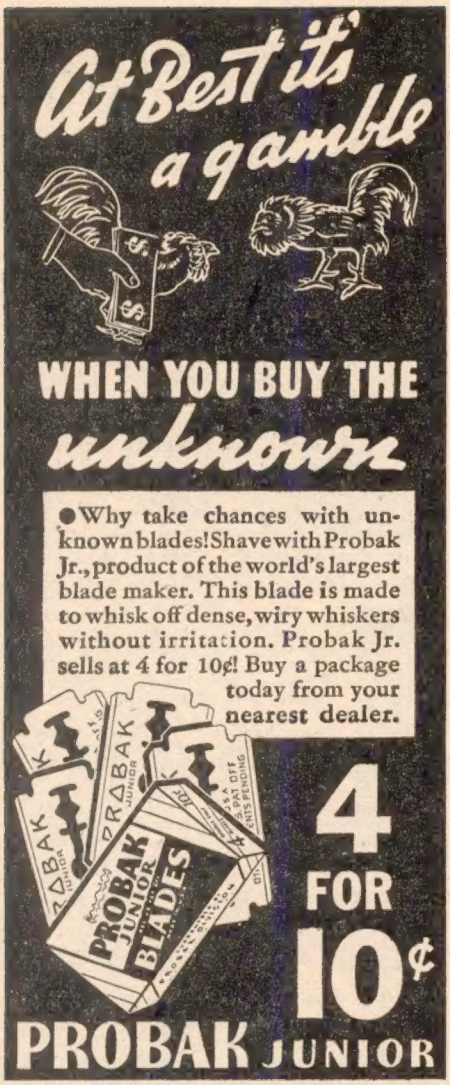
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Next Month!

A Tiny David Story

By ROBERT MILL

The Treasure

A pre-view from the great novel which starts next month—

THE two wild Irishmen called Flane and Thurland, and their nephew the boy Jim, escaped alive from the great adventure described by Mr. Dwyer in his famous "Caravan Treasure"—alive and still seeking treasure and trouble. In Paris it was that they heard the story of Angkor, that gigantic and amazing deserted city in far Cambodia—heard it from another wild hawk of trouble, a Russian, and from an ancient Siamese priest who seemed to have the secret of prolonged life. The Russian translated as the old bonze told the story which explained why the great cities of Angkor were suddenly deserted five hundred years ago: A deadly plague had smitten them.

"THE king ordered the evacuation of Angkor. A thousand pirogues made out of the trunks of great trees, pirogues with forty rowers in each, were gathered on Grand-Lac, and the king and his hundred wives, and the nobles and their wives went aboard them, leaving the poor of the city to shift for themselves.

"Into the pirogues they put the treasures of Angkor: The great pearls that came from Jiddah and Koseir, rose-colored like those that Marco Polo had seen placed in the mouths of the dead in the city of Ta-pin-zu, pearls that had been soaked for seventy days in the milk of white mares to increase their luster! Great emeralds that preserved the chastity of the women who wore them, so it was said; diamonds that made men invisible, and enormous rubies that were thought to be the eyes of dead snakes. And gold! Bars of gold that weighed down the pirogues till the rowers screamed in fear. And in the dark night, with the soldiers beating off the poor who tried to rush the boats, the great line of pirogues streamed off across Grand-Lac.

"Heading for the Mekong, a great river coming down from the lost country of Tibet, through wild passes in the mountains, its banks filled with great high trees in which are thousands and thousands of monkeys, sitting so close to each other that their tails hang down like a fringe from the branches on which they squat.

"And they screamed and gibbered at the nobles and their women. And the women pelted them with food and fruit which the apes caught. And some of the women, made mad with fear of the death that chased them, threw

of Monsieur Methuselah

By JAMES FRANCIS DWYER

their heavy bangles at the monkeys, laughing and screaming as they did so. And big birds followed the pirogues to get the food that was tossed from them. Great birds like you see in the big Zoölogical Gardens—flamingoes, and cormorants, and great crested cranes the height of a man. And the noise and the shouting woke the enormous bats that slept in the thick foliage of the trees." . . .

(Thurland and Flane talk it over. The great treasure is a terrific lure to them, even as the hope of learning the bonze's secret of longevity drove the Russian into this desperate venture. Moreover they are yearning for a change of climate:)

"I was told once," said Thurland to Flane, "that for every man in the world there is a climate that suits his soul and his body and that he should search till he finds it. A wise man in Fez told me."

"It may be," said Flane, "but for myself I've never found one that suits exactly. They're either too hot or too cold, and if the climate is halfway bearable the police are not."

(They make ready to set out; the Russian's niece, a girl named Joyeuse, is to go with them.)

She explained her name to me. Charlemagne called his great sword *Joyeuse;* and blended in the steel, so she said, was the lance-point that pierced the side of Our Lord. Her words thrilled me.

"It's strange to be named after a sword," I said.

"In French the word *sword* is feminine," she answered. She had a queer way with her.

(They drive across France to take ship at Marseilles.)

There are no other roads like the roads of France. For a road gets character from the people who pass over it, gathering grace or deviltry from the shoes of their feet or the hoofs of their horses. . . . The ride had made us friends. The ride and the fact that we were on our way to see the evening star shine upon Angkor. In my dreams I thought that D'Artagnan and Aramis were going with us; Porthos having got drunk at Fontainebleu, where we left him sleeping under the trees.

(They arrive in Cambodia.)

We found a boat. A motor-launch that was clean and comfortable. Its owner, an undersized Annamese, knew the river from My-tho to Luang-Prabang, the capital of the Lac state of the same name, to which he said he went often to get loads of cutch, cardomom, indigo, cinnamon, deer-horns, ivory, and fish-roe.

Joyeuse laughed as he named his cargoes. "Ask him if he ever carried wim-wams for a goose's bridle or silver coronets for toads," she whispered.

(Thurland hadn't much sympathy with the Russian's search for the secret of prolonging life.)

My Uncle Thurland told us of a man in Kerry who thought, like the Russian count, to beat death. He offered his soul to the devil if Old Nick could prolong his days to two hundred years, and the devil agreed. On his two hundredth birthday Satan arrived to collect, but the old man had grown cunning. "Have a drink before we leave," he said. "This is a drop of whisky that never paid a penny to a gauger."

The devil was in a good humor and sat down at the table to please the old man. "That's a great patch of potatoes I have there," said the old fellow, and when the devil turned his head to look at the spuds the ancient poured holy water into the whisky in the devil's glass.

"May you never run short of coal," said he to the devil, lifting his glass.

"That's a kind toast," said Old Nick, "and I thank you from the bottom of my heart." And when he said that he took a big mouthful of the whisky and holy water.

He let a roar out of him that people heard five miles away. Flames flew out of his mouth and set the cabin afire, and he left with a rush that took the door off its hinges.

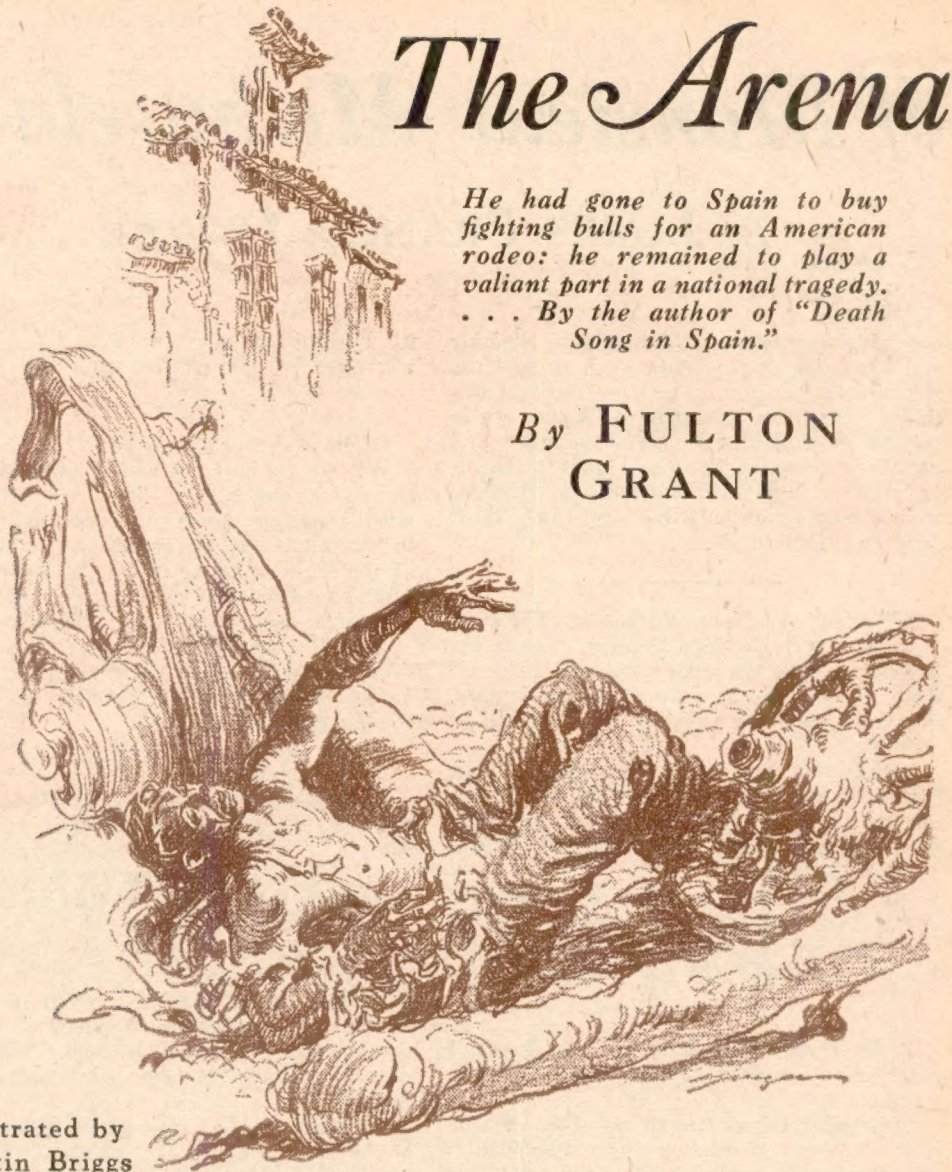
The old man, said my uncle, went on living quietly till he was fool enough to fire a charge of buckshot into an English landlord. They hanged him in Glengariff, and people who went to the hanging said that they saw the devil waiting near the gibbet.

Don't miss this fascinating story—in our next issue!

The Arena

He had gone to Spain to buy fighting bulls for an American rodeo: he remained to play a valiant part in a national tragedy. . . . By the author of "Death Song in Spain."

By FULTON GRANT



Illustrated by Austin Briggs

YOU would not have seen it in the papers; or if you did, you would not have known. Adams Whitehead knew better than to try to get it past the military censors in Bilbao; and besides, some stories you can't print in the dailies, even if you're hard-boiled and believe in the "sacredness" of news.

SURFACE CALM REIGNS IN BILBAO AS AMATEUR BULLFIGHTS REGALE CITIZENS STOP ABORTIVE ATTACK BY MOB ON AMERICAN CITIZEN REPORTED BUT NOT CONFIRMED STOP NIGHTLY QUOTE PURIFICATION UNQUOTE BY ARMED VIGILANTES IS FILLING STREETS WITH MUTILATED BODIES . . . .

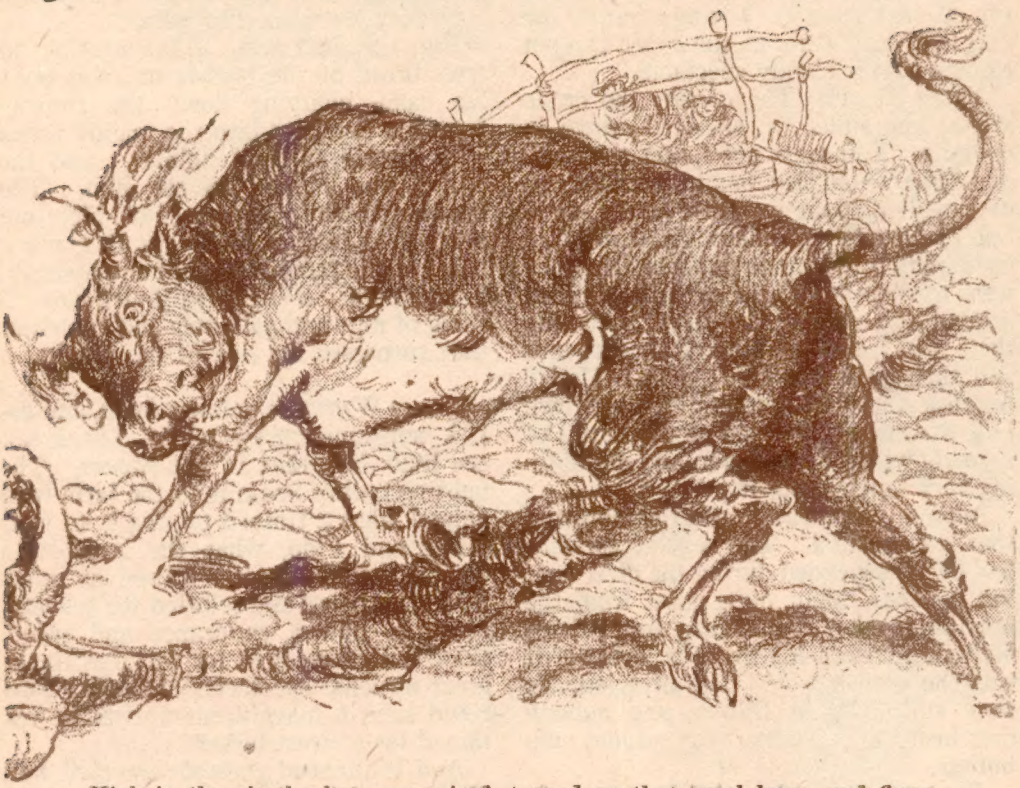
That was the way he covered it—safe and unspecific.

If you saw it dressed up as part of a week-end "atmosphere" story, you would never guess what lay under it.

If it's told here, you can be sure the names are changed, because Whitehead wouldn't want to tell it otherwise; and besides it would be unfair to Shorty Bill.

It isn't going to embarrass Adams Whitehead to say that his assignment to Bilbao was a kind of minor tragedy. Not only because Bilbao is the most un-Spanish city in Spain, without joy, without music, without grace—a city of zinc-miners, tingling with arrogance, the very flues of the blast furnaces belching particles of class-hatred that sifts into the fog they breathe instead of air. Not only for those reasons, but because no newspaper man wants to be shut up in a town where nothing is likely to happen, while

# of Madmen



High in the air the boy was raised, turned on that cruel horn, and flung.

there is a chance to follow an army. No newspaper man wants to cover his stories from a café terrace while pitched battles are going on a couple of hundred miles away. And when the news-editor in London sent him off to Bilbao in July, it was like a sword-wound in the pride of Adams Whitehead. Nor could you blame him.

But that was in July.

By September, Whitehead had taken a lesson in mob-psychology, a grim, harsh instruction in those deep recesses of human nature which, under stress, yield a fruit of shame and of bestiality. He had seen greed and jealousy flying the banner of patriotism. He had seen Hate stalking the streets like some fantastic ghost whose feet dripped blood on the cobbles. He had seen men and women and little children burned and crucified and cut down, for the reason that they ventured to worship God, or because they may have known some one who knew somebody else who had once saluted an aristocrat. By September, Whitehead had forgotten his disappointment and resentment; if he still found reason to resent Bilbao, those reasons were of a different sort.

But the incident of September 18 had humor. The devil himself would have grinned to see Shorty Bill yelling at the mob, cursing them, defying them, challenging them: the terrible fury of him, which was noble and ridiculous too; and the crazy vengeance of him, which you would never believe and which served the mob with its own soup, they not liking it at all. There is a picture for you, like a cartoon scrawled on the margin of the Book of Life.

IT began about three o'clock. They had barricaded a street by piling up hand-carts and wagons; and some money-minded devil had organized a *capea*. A "*capea*" is a mock bullfight; none of your classical *corrida de toros* with its pomp and splendor and grace and science and blood and ghastly bravery. The blood is often there, but that is all. In the *capea*, the street-brawl bullfight, you have a handful of youngsters, many of

them in their 'teens, pretending to be matadors, teasing a bull with red capes, and assuming poses in imitation of the great Belmonte or Joselito. If the bull's horns are padded, it is about as much fun as bad amateur boxing; but if the bull is given his horns, the *capea* can get to be a pretty bloody spectacle.

Three o'clock: The *capea;* the crude arena; the sullen, mean-faced crowd in overalls. You must not forget the overalls. The whole city was in overalls. All of Loyalist Spain was in overalls, symbol of Spanish Communism, by which grumblers could prove publicly that they were workers. And the overalls crowded around the rim of the show, whistling their *pitos* and making their cat-calls and their yells of "Hou! Hou! Hou!" because the first pathetic little brown bull was merely puzzled at the antics of a young would-be matador, and did nothing very much about it.

Adams Whitehead joined the mob, and that was natural. The regular *corridas* had been suspended during the civil war; but a *capea* might be a relief from the horrible tension of the city. And Adams Whitehead wore his overalls, because it was the easiest way. The firing-squads were still busy in Bilbao, and nobody ever heard of a passport that would stop bullets.

The young matador tried hard enough. Awkward, he was, and filled with the false courage of bravado and swagger; but the little brown bull merely glared and remained in his *querencia* near the end of the arena.

"Hou! Hou! Hou!" cried the mob. "*Que se vaya!* Throw him out and get a bull, not such a *maldito* calf as this one."

The lad's swagger was immense. His gangling legs swirled with his body as he attempted a *mariposa,* or butterfly movement, with the cape, almost under the bull's padded horns.

THEN the little bull's comprehension of the insults hurled at him seemed to act like a sudden stimulant. The *morillo,* the hump at the back of his neck, inflated; and he charged. The knob of his horn found its way under the thigh of the swaggering youth and tossed him clear of the barricade, neatly into the overalled laps of Bilbao's citizens, screaming and frightened and bruised, but not much hurt.

And the crowd roared. They liked that. They had paid their one peseta to see that. It whetted them. It suggested that there could be more. And when the little bull, feeling that he had made his efforts for the day, returned to his *querencia,* they roared and screamed at the management to give them a real bull.

So they got what they wanted.

Big, this bull was. No *morucho,* no cross-breed of the beef-farms, this one! He came charging down the runway from his cage and into the muddy arena with an air of regal nobility; and the crowd was hushed to see him. The brown-and-white pattern of his hide told every soul in that mob that this was a beast of the famous Vistahermosa strain, a conqueror, a tiger in bull's-hide, a thing of rage and gallantry and fierceness that surpasses the lion of the jungle.

ADAMS WHITEHEAD knew bulls, and astonishment grew in him. You do not see bulls like that in the *capeas.* The fighting bull of Spain is to the farm-bred animal what a trained pit-dog is to your old friend Fido, what the lynx is to Tabby the house-cat. Raised at unbelievable expense and selected for bravery, strength, power, endurance and speed, these bulls were sold for fortunes to the great national spectacles of Spain. How could such a magnificent animal be obtained for a street fight?

And Whitehead guessed: the civil war. This would be some animal which had been excluded from the bull-ring, a bull which had gored a human, which had learned to use his horns, some defective beast, rejected because of excess viciousness or failing to qualify in the rigid classical standards, but deadly, dangerous, ferocious. And some money-grabbing broker of *toros de corrida* would have sold him to the *capea* manager, inconsiderate of the danger to life and limb of the poor half-starved boys who might be pitted against him.

There were no pads on those horns. There would be no chance for bluff and bravado to substitute for courage. The lad who would step into the ring with this monster must be prepared to die. Whitehead knew it. The crowd knew it. And the little knot of matadors who hesitated, staring at the huge needle-pointed horns, covering fear with politeness, bowing to each other to yield the "honor" of facing death—they knew it too.

One of them stepped out into the mud and called to the bull, flourishing his cape. The bull charged—charged silently, and without bellowing. The crowd was utterly silent.

The bull again began bouncing and tossing; but no effort could shake off that knot of human muscle.

This lad was good, Whitehead thought. This lad knew his bulls, stood his ground, flicked his cape with a clever movement of his left hand, led the bull into a sudden turn, bringing the horns close to his body in a gesture almost good enough for a professional, and brought the animal across him harmlessly to his other side.

And the crowd hissed! Yes, hissed.

Bilbao is almost legend in Spain. Everybody knows its reputation. In Bilbao the crowds flock to the *corridas,* not to see expert and graceful manipulation of the *banderillos* and the *muleta,* not to see poise and grace and bravery and magnificent timing of slow-motion movements. They want blood; they want what somebody has described as "Death in the Afternoon;" and they want it every afternoon. Death, they want, and blood and gorings—not art. That's Bilbao; and many a professional matador has stumbled from the heights of his career in Bilbao, stumbled and died. The present crop of matadors avoid Bilbao like the pest. And for reason.

The huge fist on the end of that apelike arm swung with deadly aim, and the little rat-man sprawled in the mud.

The crowd hissed.

Whitehead could see what happened. He could understand that boy. He could feel the astonishment, the surprise, the confusion of him. The boy was betrayed by the crowd. He had done a brave and goodly thing. He had done well. And they hissed him. He had expected applause, and he heard only their *pitos.* "Damn them," the boy was saying, "damn them for a bunch of mean-faced traitors! I'll show them."

Furious and betrayed, he faced the bull. The bull charged, raging. Swirling the cape, the lad flicked it past the needle horns like a reincarnation of the great Belmonte, passing the bull and waiting for the animal to turn again.

Very slowly—tortuously and with unbelievable poise, that lad sank to his knees, half covering himself with the red, while the bull thundered down upon him. Whitehead held his breath. Slowly, slowly, slowly, the cape unfolded and fanned out. The lad was attempting one of the most difficult of all the *suertes,* a pass that turns the bull in a slow circle around the kneeling man, using the centrifugal force of the animal's charge to throw him off balance. He was attempting it, and doing it too; and perhaps he would have grown from that street ring into another Joselito at the Plaza de Toros at Madrid—perhaps, save for that crowd.

"Hou! Hou!" they yelled. *"Cobarde* —coward! He is tricking. He is bluffing. *Que se vaya! Trampa!* Stop your trickery and play the bull!"

It was brutal, that cry. It was mean and sullen and cheap and totally wrong; and it crashed into the ears of that clever, brave little lad and dulled some corner of his brain.

Still kneeling, still leading the beast in a circle with his cape, he lifted his eyes, turned his head and glared his justified wrath at the crowd. Whitehead saw his lips moving, and could imagine the words that he muttered.

And in that fraction of a second his cape faltered, and the deadly horns swerved inward, finding the boy's thigh. High in the air the boy was raised, turned on the cruel horn, and flung against one of the heavy wagons that formed the *barrera.* The bull whirled, charged and found the inert, helpless lad again, picked him up, turned him on his horn as though on a murderous pivot, and flung him into another cart, just beyond reach—a broken, bleeding, pitiful blob which had once been a brave-spirited youth, trying hard and doing well.

And the crowd roared—with *laughter!*

That got their applause. That was what they had come to see.

They laughed and laughed, did that crowd; but Adams Whitehead could not laugh. He could only turn, sickened and disgusted with humans who saw amusement in murder, and mutter his abhorrence. For it was murder. This thing was death, as surely as though that crowd had taken the young matador and torn his body, or hanged him, or burned him on a cross of fire, as Whitehead had already seen the Bilbao crowd do. Murder it was. Their hissing broke the boy's heart—threw him off guard and let the bull get him. They had done it, and they laughed at it. There is nothing so

sadistic as a crowd. Murderers, they seemed to Adams Whitehead—bloody, cruel murderers!

And, it seemed, there was some one else who thought the same. The man was just beside Adams Whitehead, although he had not noticed him before. You don't focus on an atom in a crowd. But now he heard this atom's voice, yelling back at the mob, screaming at them, shouting at them, calling them what they were, damned murderers—and calling it out in plain English.

English, mind you, in that overalled Bilbao crowd!

"Yah damn' coyotes!" he was yelling. "Yah lousy punks, yah dirty murderers! Yah blankety-blank sons of lice—"

WHITEHEAD turned, stared at him. A little man, to be making such a noise. A squat, square little man with bowed legs and huge long arms, waving a pair of burly fists and pouring out language that would make a gunnery sergeant blush—with envy. Queer, funny little man, he was, with a faded blue flannel shirt and no necktie, and a pair of dirty cotton trousers, and an enormous hat, a fabulous hat, the kind of a hat you read about in impossible wild-West stories, so big you could hide a small child in it. Queer, he was, and comic, like a monkey on a string or a futile jumping-jack. Comedy is a strange, human thing. Laughter, they say, is a throwback to the cave-man days, when we bared our teeth to gloat over a weaker enemy. We find fun when others are hurt. We laugh at slapstick comedy, and the fat lady slipping on an icy pavement gives us a broad grin. There was that kind of comedy in this little chap. You could have laughed at it. But Adams Whitehead wasn't laughing at it. He wasn't having any of that comedy just then. For that little man was asking for death. Just death. Begging for it—and he was pretty obviously an American.

"Excuse me," said Adams Whitehead, reaching out and tapping the fellow tentatively on the arm. "Excuse me—I don't blame you for being sore—"

"What the hell—"

Like a steel spring he was. Like a bent sword, all steel and ready to spring.

"Who in blazes are you? Talk fast."

The big apelike arms were ready to go into action, and the huge fists were doubled. That man was mad.

"Sorry," said Adams Whitehead then. "Didn't mean to butt in; but I'm an American too. You can't curse this crowd and get away with it. If somebody understands English, they'll pull you to pieces. I don't blame you, though. I saw that kid. . . . Say, let me take you out of here and get a drink."

Little round eyes, little round steel buttons of eyes. Pinched, weather-beaten little ape's face with a long lower lip ready to spit out good solid American cuss-words, and big hands ready to fight anything or anybody.

But the face broke into a grin. Wonderful grin, it was, like sun through a cloud, betraying gold in the teeth and more gold in the heart.

"Say," he said, slowly, with a broad Western drawl, "say, pardner, I reckon yore right, at that. But gee, I'd sure like to bust somebody open. What's yore name, pardner, an' how'd you git here in this hell-hole?"

Whitehead told him.

"Newspaper feller, hey?" said the grin. "Well, I'll be jiggered! I seen a lot o' you fellers in my day. Name's Andrews. Call me Shorty, Mister—Shorty Bill Andrews, that's me. An' say, I'll take you-all up on that drink."

But that drink never came, because the crowd shouted again, and there was another note in their cry—not jeering, this time, not laughter, not mockery, but fear. Mortal terror—stark, naked fear.

What Adams Whitehead saw when he turned back to the arena in that flash of a second was a scrambling bunch of young men with capes, all trying to lure the furious bull from the barrier where he had been still intent upon getting his horns into the bleeding wreck of a boy who had been their comrade. Scrambling, they were; and one of them had vaulted the carts and was running, white-faced and frenzied, straight into the crowd, unashamed and frankly in terror. And the huge brown-and-white animal plunged headlong into that same cart, three feet behind him, like a battering-ram, demolishing the wagons, hurling them to the ground.

THEN it happened.

The maddened beast charged again, leaped through the breach he had rammed in the crude wall, and came thundering into the very heart of the crowd.

And the animal's course was straight for where Whitehead was standing—nearly a ton of raging muscle and sinews, bent on wrecking death to all things on two feet.

A body flew into the air. A scream of terror and agony pierced through the crowd's yelling. Thunder of hoofs and scrambling of feet. Dull thud of smashing cranium striking yielding flesh. Another body tossed high. And on he came.

Whitehead was paralyzed, but a strong hand jerked him violently to the side as the odd little man called Shorty Bill Andrews cried out to him:

"Budge, pardner! We're leavin' here *pronto*. Gee, but that critter's mad."

The white-and-brown mass hurtled by, stopped, lifted a man and flung him ten feet to the side, snorted and charged on. Stampede. People trod upon people. On the fringe of it, the desire to see blood swayed the crowd inward against the outward tide of those who were running for their lives. Lashing with his horns, the bull was everywhere, leaving stricken bodies behind him. An engine of death had got loose in that soft, helpless crowd of humans who had only just now jeered at bravery.

"God a'mighty," murmured Shorty Bill as if to himself, "somebody's gotta stop him—he'll kill everybody." And before Adams Whitehead's hand could clutch him back, he had run swiftly on his arc-shaped legs, after the plunging bull.

THE show began there. Unbelievable, it was, incongruous and impossible, but a fact. The little man yelled like an Indian. His strident voice pierced the screaming of the mob, and the giant bull whirled in his course to investigate this new opponent who came up from behind. The bull stood there, briefly, blinking in rage, the erectile hump of his neck high and swollen, then he charged full at the little man, head lowered, horns dripping.

But Shorty Bill was not there for the charge. Like a cat, he faded and gave way to one side, avoiding the swerving horns by the merest fraction of an inch, and letting the brown streak fly past him. The animal's feet plowed into the dirt, checking his charge, and the body turned in a skid. In that instant Shorty Bill leaped. He leaped straight at the bull's back, while Adams Whitehead stared unbelieving; and the Bilbao crowd, for once, were silent. The little man's arms encircled the swollen neck, and his hand found a horn. He dangled there, a dead weight on the animal's tossing head, and brought the monster to a puzzled halt. Then Shorty Bill's legs wrapped themselves around the neck, and he hung there like a barnacle.

But the bull went into action. Whitehead had never conceived anything so incredible as that huge beast's agility and his strength. Like a truck prancing, he was, leaping and shaking and bellowing and dancing; but he could not dislodge the human barnacle that threw him off balance. He charged, stopped short, twisted, and flung his great head; but the man held on. Then, as though baffled, he paused, and the dangling man threw himself with a sudden movement until his entire body's weight pulled on the left horn of the bull. And the bull began again, bouncing and tossing, but now without speed, without that mighty speed that had driven him before. His neck was askew, his head cocked to one side; and no effort could shake off that clinging knot of human muscle that weighted him down.

Head low, the bull stopped again, breathing heavily.

With a lightning leap, the little man was off him. His apelike arms reached for a stronger grip on the horns; and with a strength that seemed impossible, Shorty Bill wrenched that bulging neck down and to the left, a sharp, deft, powerful jerk.

And the bull staggered, reeled. Like a flash, Bill's foot shot out and kicked the foreleg of the bull under the joint. The leg gave. The bull crashed to the ground. The man jerked the horns again with that deadly twist. Some nerve in that huge body snapped, and the monster lay still, a mere lump of flesh stretched out in the mud.

Then Bill leaped quickly away.

Shouts of the crowd, shouts of the young matadors. Running feet as the *vaqueros*, men charged with the care of the animals in these shows, came running with ropes. And before the benumbed animal could recover the strength which had been sapped from him, he was hog-tied and secured, ready to be led on hobbled hoofs into the van which had brought him to the *capea*.

That was all.

IT was all, except the Bilbao crowd. You have seen crowds like that. They wanted blood. What did it matter to those back on the fringe, to those who stood in the safety of the arena's other sides, whether the beast had killed, maimed and gored a dozen or so of their number? They wanted blood. They had the taste of it. And if the bull broke through, it was their right to butcher that

animal. Who was this little man to steal that right from them?

Adams Whitehead had seen similar things, before this. He remembered, and quickly, too, that incident in Valladolid, some years before, when a bull had broken through the barrier at a *capea,* and had wounded several of the crowd. That crowd went insane. They killed the bull. They killed the bull with knives and canes and clubs and razors—literally tore him into pieces in an hysterical blood-debauchery, in the same sort of fury which inspires lynchings and burnings at the stake back home in America.

And that was the mood this Bilbao crowd was in.

Did they cheer this American who had saved so many lives—whose skill, whose courage, whose presence of mind had conquered the fierce animal before he could do further harm? They did not. They had been cheated. They wanted blood. They wanted vengeance against that bull. And this fool of a foreigner had only interfered.

So they hissed him. Believe it or not, they hissed him. Ask your Spanish friends about Bilbao crowds.

WHITEHEAD was running. He saw the little American standing there, puffing and white and puzzled, facing the hostile crowd.

"No hay derecho—" they were screaming. "He has no right to interfere, pig of a foreigner. *Que se fuera!* Let him get to hell out of here! Is this a bullfight or a *mancornar,* a bulldogging? Throw him out! Kick him out! Drag him out!"

They were throwing things. A bottle plopped on the muddy ground near to where the little ape-man was standing, but he only stared at it, unbelieving.

"Fuera! Que se vaya!"

A chunk of wood struck his shoulder a glancing blow and dropped at his feet, but Shorty Bill still stared at them, dazed and shaking his head.

Whitehead ran. He pushed his way through the maddened people, almost fighting them, and broke through the *barrera.*

"Get going, Andrews," he called out. "This is going to be bad."

Like a little boy who had broken a vase which he only meant to push out of the way, Shorty Bill Andrews looked up at him in hurt bewilderment.

"Gosh," he said, "what're they yellin' for? Didn't I stop that there bull?"

How could Whitehead explain, in an instant, the psychopathic *tic* of this aggregate of insane atoms?

"For God's sake, shut up and start running," he shouted; but it was already too late. A little ratlike, wizened-faced man was standing there in front of Andrews, waving his hands and bleating in a screaming falsetto, spewing forth unprintable vowels. Others were pushing through the barrier—howling, running. They were crowding about the two Americans, flourishing their arms.

Then the rodentlike one spat. In an ecstasy of rage, he spat in the face of Shorty Bill Andrews, and the spark was at the powder.

The huge fist on the end of that apelike arm swung with deadly aim, and the little rat-man sprawled in the mud. It swung again, and the squat, Moorish-eyed laborer from the mines whose voice had been so strident, sprawled after him. Whitehead was in a panic now. He could see the end of this. He grabbed the furious Westerner by the arm and dragged at him, crying:

"Don't, don't, for God's sake! They'll kill us. We haven't a chance. Man, I've seen this crowd pull people limb from limb. Start running."

But Shorty Bill was beyond reason. He would have charged the crowd single-handed, had not Adams Whitehead picked him up bodily, kicking and swearing, and started running across the arena to the cattle-vans.

And it was time, too; for the fatal cry —the thing Whitehead had been dreading—squealed from the bleeding lips of the rat-man on the ground, and was instantly caught up by the crowd:

"A la muerte, el fascisto! Kill the fascist spy!"

HOW many times in the past weeks had he heard that death-call? How often had he seen men or women or children, whole families, dragged by the mob to that terrible square where a permanent firing-squad mowed them down like corn, or spiked them, screaming and writhing in agony, to a blood-stained wall? "Fascist spy!" That was the blood-cry in Bilbao. If you argued about the price of a fish, the vendor might yell, "Fascist spy!" and your body would be browned by tomorrow's sun. If you smiled at the airs of some clod of the militia, the howl of "Fascist spy" might awaken the light-sleeping demons of the mob, and your remains would be strewn

across the boulevards. It was the cry of the wolf-pack, the hunting call of human animals gone amok with the insanity of revolution.

"A la muerte! A la muerte! Kill them, burn them! Fascist spies!"

BUT it takes a crowd a little time to get into motion; those seconds saved Whitehead. He was a big man, Whitehead; but the weight of a squirming body in his arms did not make for speed. He fought for air. He fought for distance. He fought against the terror of that wolf-cry behind him: *"A la muerte! Católicos! Fascistos!"*

Across a street, darting down a narrow lane between yellow plaster houses, the voices seemed more distant, but he knew they were coming. He stopped short and let the twisting body of Bill slide to the ground, saying:

"Now come on, I can't carry you."

"Okay, pardner," said Bill. "I reckon I was wrong. Where you figure on goin'?"

"I don't know—anywhere."

"Okay, then. Yah better come along with me. I gotta place to go, right around the corner here."

NO time for discussion. Whitehead followed for his life. They ran. The little man called Shorty Bill scrambled, catlike, apelike, over the rough cobbles, darting into unexpected alleys, showing a surprising knowledge of this part of the city, which to Whitehead was a maze and a mystery. Who the devil was he? What was he doing here, of all places?

A scattered vanguard of the mob was close behind now, and a rough stone rattled near them as they ran.

"A la muerte!"

"This is it," shouted Bill over his shoulder, and vanished into a curious structure, a sort of small door opening through a portion of a great, high portal, studded with iron bolts. Whitehead followed him through, watched the little man turn and slam the small door, shoving an immense bolt into place.

It was a queer spot. The portal seemed to be in a high plaster-and-stone wall, surrounding a large, sparsely grassed corral or stable-yard. Whitehead noticed a long, low building at the extreme end, and several head of cattle huddling together near this structure.

"A la muerte! Fascistos! Católicos!"

Already some of the crowd were shouting and beating on the gate.

"Listen, pardner," Shorty Bill was saying. "You keep still, see? This here corral is full of bulls—tough bulls. They belong to me, sort of. I been tryin' to get 'em on a ship outa this town fer near a month, now. Don't you make no move unless I tell yah, see? Me, I know bulls an' cattle. They won't bother me none, but don't you make no move; jest foller me. Maybe we'll show them there coyotes a few yit."

"Bulls?" wondered Whitehead, keeping close to this strange little man. "Say, just who the devil are you, anyhow?"

"I'm jest a cow-hand, sorta. Ever hear o' Red Rowley's Rough Ridin' Rodeo Show, back home?"

Red Rowley's Rough Riding Rodeo. . . . A rodeo, cowboys, broncos, steers, lariats—most American of all American spectacles, suddenly turning up here in the maelstrom of Spain, torn by revolution! It wasn't possible. It wasn't imaginable. It didn't make any sense. Red Rowley, the hero of every American lad from ten to twenty, Red Rowley's Rough Riders! Next to Buffalo Bill, perhaps, or next after the "Greatest Show on Earth," Red Rowley's Rodeo was the tissue out of which American boys' dreams are made. And what the devil had it to do with Bilbao, Spain?

But there was no time for questioning. The voice of the multitude was rising over the outer wall: *"A la muerte!"*

"You stay here, pardner. Don't move none until I tell yah, see? I'm goin' to get them bulls movin'. I'm goin' to fix up a little reception-committee fer them lousy sons out there. Now listen: You keep close to this wall, see? An' when them bulls comes movin' fast, you run an' open that there big door. There's a bar that slides easy. You open it, see, and you hide behind the door so them bulls don't see yah. That's all you need to do, pardner."

WHITEHEAD knew it was their only chance; if this queer little cow-hand could stampede the bulls into the crowd, there'd be no more trouble. It didn't matter that the whole business was incongruous, impossible, incredible. It didn't matter who this little man was, who called himself Shorty Bill. It only mattered that he was running toward the low stable-buildings where the black and brown beasts stood together, lowering their heads and puffing the hump on their necks, already angry that two humans should dare to venture into their private world.

There was a sudden silence, broken only by the thunder of hoofs. Then a mad scream: *"Los toros! Cuidado!"*

IS it possible that humans can speak with dumb animals? Is it possible that there are some members of the human species who have a gift of transmitting thought to lower species? Whitehead tossed the speculation aside and watched the miracle that was happening before his eyes.

Shorty Bill Andrews, cow-man, ran unafraid into the very horns of those dozen or more fighting bulls. . . . Miuras, they were, and Vistahermosas and Lesacas and Saavedras—monster specimens of the most famous fighters bred in Spain, weighing over half a ton each, fearless, ready to attack anything from a red rag to a locomotive, with their needle horns. But Shorty Bill's voice, shouting strange sounds, baffled them, puzzled them, restrained them. *"Yip-e-e-e-e-e! Baya-a-a-a-a-a! Yip-e-e-e-e-e!"* Adams Whitehead could see his apelike figure scurrying around them, dodging around the stables, coming up in the rear of them, waving his arms, and always shouting.

Then the small herd moved, slowly, at first, but cantering slightly, until the rhythm spread among them.

"A la muerte!"

The cry came over the wall. There was beating at the great portal. Heads

appeared above the wall. The figure of a man scrambled at the top, ready to jump. Whitehead saw him start, stare, miss his footing, and fall inward into the corral, saw him stare in terror at the slowly oncoming herd of animals, heard him scream and break into a run along the wall.

And Whitehead ran toward the door.

"A la muerte los fascistos!"

The long steel bar was well oiled. It slid two feet into a socket, and the great door was free. Slowly he braced himself for the pull. There was a cast pressure from without. No need to pull, after all. There was thunder behind him. The herd's speed was increasing. The door was yielding toward him. His strength was nothing to the surging of the crowd outside. Thunder behind. Coming nearer. "Yip-e-e-e-e-e!" Thundering down, a forest of horns. "Give it to her, boy," came Bill's voice. "Let 'em have it."

And Adams Whitehead leaned away from the door, letting the crowd pour through, shielding himself behind the vast, high, heavy oaken panel, clinging to the handle of the small door-within-the-door which it framed.

"A la muerte, los—"

And then there was a sudden silence, broken only by the thunder of hoofs. Then a scream:

"Los toros! Cuidado!"

Whitehead pushed himself against the wall in the small angle of the door, blinded by it, shielded by it, as the thunder came on.

ADAMS WHITEHEAD was glad that he did not witness that impact. The crowd outside might have numbered a thousand. It filled the street in a solid mass, and its momentum was toward the great doorway to the corral—not away. It is not easy to turn a crowd. It was not easy for those few, in front, who saw death charging down upon them, to push back the force that was pressing them on. Whitehead heard their screams, their cries. Heard their struggles. Heard the rumble of the ground beneath him as the bulls came through. Felt the shock against the oaken door as heavy shoulders or horns or broad beef flanks struck it with irresistible force. Heard the soft, dull impact of bone against yielding flesh. Heard the screams of mutilated humans, tossed on bloody horns or trampled under the tide of hoofs. Heard the scramble and scuffle of frenzied humans, only just now so intent upon the kill—themselves fighting to escape from a death that was inescapable.

And then the strain caught him. The high pitch of his nerves broke under the pressure of it all, and he swam in darkness, clutched at the wall, felt his fingers groping and missing, felt himself slide to the sand and grass underneath, and lost consciousness.

"REPORTED but not confirmed!" There is a little cafe in Bilbao on a street called naïvely or ironically, "The Street-Where-Life-Begins."

Not far from there is the American Consulate. Not far from there, during those terrible weeks of civil strife, was a cordon of *guardias civiles* protecting the official buildings, both Spanish and foreign, from the possible ravages of the mob. The cafe is called El Fundador, and it is correct to sit there and talk, drinking long glasses of *anisado*.

Adams Whitehead sat there, with a pencil in his hand, at nine o'clock, writing the words of that ubiquitous cable, "Reported but not confirmed." Opposite him sat a little man in a stiff, new gabardine suit that seemed to be all corners and edges and to be very uncomfortable indeed, and the little man was talking.

"So you see, pardner, that's the way it was. Them longhorn steers we use in the rodeo, well, they're gettin' kinda civilized, what with ranchin' gettin' to be sort of a dude racket these days. An' Red Rowley, he was aimin' to do a little special breedin'. He was fixin' to breed them Spanish bulls into the longhorn strain an' make a tougher bunch fer us to rassle with. So he sends me over here to pick up them bulls. I got to this here town last July an' I was goin' to nurse them bulls all the way to Sacramento, only there wasn't any ships leavin' this port on account o' the war, see?"

"That's a swell story, Bill," Adams Whitehead was saying. "That'll make a big feature for the Sunday papers. Longhorn steers in America going sissy; Red Rowley, of rodeo fame, buys Spanish fighting bulls to save the breed. Bilbao mob assaults American cowboy who saves life by releasing bulls. That's the best yarn I ever heard of. I ought to get a bonus for that story, Bill. Now if you were a newspaper man you'd understand."

The little man quietly stood his glass on the marble table-top, his hands trem-

bling a little, his pinched face strained, staring at Whitehead.

"Don't write it, Mister," he said.

Whitehead repeated the words, slowly, questioningly.

"Don't *write* it! Good Lord, Shorty, why not?"

"Jest don't, that's all."

"Why, man alive, you'll be a hero. Every paper in the country will play it up: 'Rodeo cowboy saves American press correspondent assaulted by mob—'"

Older, Shorty looked—suddenly older. Wise, he looked suddenly, with years of wisdom drawn from simplicity, gleaned from broad-swept plains. His voice was husky, strained:

"Listen," he said, and then stopped. When he went on again, it was a whisper that barely lifted his voice across the table.

"Listen, Mister," he said again, "I aint thinkin' of the story. I don't wanta be no hero—not like that. I aint thinking about you an' me. I'm thinkin' about people—all kinds o' people—folks back home and folks over here an' everywhere. Me, I'll be near fifty year old soon, an' I seen a few—people, I mean, an' things they do. I aint thinkin' no more about how they wanted to kill us deader'n a stuffed skunk today. I'm thinkin' about what them folks is goin' to think maybe a year from now."

WHITEHEAD swallowed his *anisado* in an impatient gulp, but the tired whisper went on:

"Did you ever see a lynchin' bee, Mister?"

Adams Whitehead, startled, shook his head.

"It aint pretty at all. 'Taint even human; but it's humans what does it, aint it?"

Shorty Bill waited for no answer.

"Yessir, it's humans what does the lynchin', an' the tar-an'-featherin' and the burnin'. An' why? On account o' somethin' comes over 'em, an' they goes hog-wild. There's things inside o' all of us, Mister, which we don't never want to come out. And then, when they does come out, it's jest rotten. We don't want to remember them things. Nossir!"

Terribly in earnest, he was. Terribly sincere. Something of it held back the easy words and checked the newspaper man's tongue. Something of it brought respect into the sentence that came from him, almost of itself.

"Well—" he said, and waited; and then: "Well—I do see—a little—what you mean. But this—well, this is a newspaper story. I don't see where it has much to do with those people. After all, they did try to kill us, didn't they? If you hadn't handled those bulls—"

The steel-button eyes were perfectly round. There was thought and power in those eyes. There was fluency in them where the lips of the man could find no easy words. And Shorty Bill Andrews, cow-man, rodeo-rider, old-timer of the plains, stammered this sentence, pregnant with a meaning far beyond mere words:

"It aint them people, Mister; it's all human bein's. There's things that's best forgot. I asked you, Mister, didn't I? I asked you if you was ever in a lynchin' mob, an' you told me no. You aint never been caught up in that feelin'. You aint, maybe, never wanted blood. You heard me ask you, didn't you, Mister? Please, Mister—"

And it was then, very slowly, very thoughtfully, that Adams Whitehead wrote that commonplace, misleading phrase of cablese: *"Reported but not confirmed."*

THAT was all. It was no harder, no easier than that. And when, some days later, Toledo fell into the hands of a victorious Fascist army—when Adams Whitehead was flown by a special airplane to Valladolid, thence transferred into the heart of civil strife about Madrid and away from that "safe" city in the North, he saw his long-wished-for dream of war-reporting fulfilled—then he remembered the awkward, phraseless whispering of that strange little man of the plains:

"It aint the people; it's all human bein's."

The corpses in the fields, the bodies of brothers murdered by brothers, the smoldering ruins of God's temples sheltering gun-nests, and the "blackbirds of death" zooming overhead—all of these things brought understanding to Whitehead. He whispered to himself, one day:

"How right he was, that little chap! There are things that are best forgot. I hope the little devil gets back safely—out of all this. Anywhere—only out—out of all this incredible bloody stupidity, this incredible, blind, miserable, insane stupidity."

Another brilliant story by Fulton Grant will appear in an early issue.

Etching by Yngve E. Soderberg. Drawings by Alec Raymond

NO less vital, in the progress of mankind, than the arms by which he conquered hostile man and beast, are the ships by which he won dominion over an alien element and explored the mysterious vast world in which he found himself. So this new series, in which a favorite writer collaborates with a sea-captain of long experience, will follow in fascinating fashion the sea-pilgrim's progress from dug-out to battle-wagon.

Ships and Men

I—Deep-Water Pioneer

By H. BEDFORD-JONES
and CAPTAIN L. B. WILLIAMS

THE San Marino shipyard was a lazy, sun-warm place, of steaming mud-flats, with every sort of old craft keeled along the shores or rotting in the creek. Away from all this backwash, the yards themselves hummed busily, while a blimp droned overhead with advertising banners displayed; across the hills, the towers of Los Angeles glittered in the blue California sky.

A number of old mariners hung about the place, inactive skippers gamming of an afternoon, or loafing in the shade. I met some queer characters here, and all of them ready and anxious to talk.

On this afternoon, as I came to the oily, dirty creek, I encountered Cap'n Powers, who in an interval of silence after a few minutes of desultory talk, took his pipe from his mouth and pointed with it to the creek.

"There's the first original sailor-man, matey!" said he. "Clap your peepers on him. Got real human sense, he has!"

Looking closely at the water, I perceived a large stick floating on the sluggish stream; on the stick was perched a grasshopper. Nothing more. Yet, as Cap'n Powers talked on, it loomed significant.

The straggling grass-growth along the edge of the creek took on shape and size to my reflective gaze. It waved heavily, in great tree-fern fronds, curled with winter's cold. The water itself changed, widened out, splotched with ice-cakes.

The floating stick grew before my eyes; it became a log, with a huge brownish splotch clinging to it. No grasshopper now, but a man. A queer man. The very look of him, like the look of those tree-ferns, carried me back and back across the centuries and ages into the bitter glacial days, the days of little three-toed horses, and ice-caps over the world. There was nothing strange in either an insect or a man floating on a bit of wood; but it did arouse one singular and exciting question which hammered for answer:

How did he get there?

FOR reply, look at Shorty the outcast, sitting alone and forlorn among the rocks, contemplating his unlovely image in a frigid pool, and wondering where his next meal was coming from. Shorty was stubby, wide-shouldered, with a most ingratiating grin, and next to nothing in the way of garments; for which lack his shaggy hair made amends.

Shorty was not admiring the scenery, by a good deal. He had been all but killed as a heretic and an enemy of society by his own people, the Fish-eaters, who lived among the huddled rocks of a narrow-necked promontory far down the icy lake. . . .

Chief Bignose had spent a year domesticating and training a wild dog, until the beast stood night watch on the long, narrow promontory. Only a fortnight back, the dog had saved the village from an attack by the Cave Folk. Shorty, anhungered and revolting against the fish and mussels, grubs and weeds of the communal pot, killed the big dog and ate him at two sittings.

So Shorty was stoned. He took refuge in the icy waters and managed to save his life by scant margin. Now, outcast, he sat unarmed and bare-handed, looking at the lake with its occasional islets of glacial ice. He had survived one encounter with this ice and water, and was not anxious for another.

SHORTY

His mouth watered at thought of the high-flavored taste of Chief Bignose's pet. He peered into the blue-green pool, and then went on to other pools, hoping for the sight of a fish, but in vain. And then, across the narrow end of the lake to which he had come, drifted a sudden and enticing scent. He rose erect, wrinkling his flat nose.

Rigid, Shorty turned his shaggy bearded head, testing the wind. Yes, nose had told truth! Blood; the scent was beyond mistake. Fresh meat was being skinned or cut up. And just across this narrow arm of the lake! Shorty cupped his hands to shut out the dazzling sheen of sun on ice and water, and began to search carefully among the trees on the opposite shore.

A movement caught his eye, and again. He fastened on the spot. Then he stiffened incredulously—and froze with excitement, at what he saw. A woman! His breath came quick and fast. His eyes glittered. Shorty, disdained by the village girls because of his small stature, now thrilled to the scent of blood and the lure of a woman at the same time—it was enough to turn a pygmy into a very hero!

What a woman! A wild girl, of the Cave Folk, with bronze-colored hair that hung to her hips. It was clean fine hair, not matted like that of the Fish-eaters; nor was her body shaggy like theirs, but covered with a lovely reddish fuzz that allowed its alluring outlines to be clearly perceived.

She was no slouch, either, but active as a man. Shorty comprehended that she was cutting up and dressing a roe deer, holding a long implement in her hand—one of those white bone knives the Cave Folk used. Shorty could see the use of the thing now; it was far better than the flints of his own people. But why the devil was this Cave-girl off on her own? Was she another outcast like himself?

"She's a beauty!" he muttered. "And worth while, if she can bring down a deer with that long knife of hers! With her brains and mine, two of us could live better and more cheaply than one. But I want some of that venison."

True; food came first. The gnawing in his empty belly was intensified by the smell and sight of food. He measured the distance across the lake arm, and shivered. In the warm season it was not so bad, but just now the lake shore held massed snow, and the water held chunks of ice; and his feet were bruised and torn. If he went around, she would take to flight long ere he could reach her. But if he went straight at the job, she would have to leave some of the meat, at least.

With a grunt and another shiver of dread, Shorty went at the shore, clambered over ice and snow and driftwood, and reached the water. At the first touch of it, his body-hair curled from the numbing shock. He took a deep breath and plunged.

IT was bitter, piercing to the very marrow. He struck out doggedly, heading straight for the opposite shore. He must have that meat or die; hang the girl! Meat meant life.

There was power and a tremendous vitality in this stubby frame of his. He progressed rapidly and furiously for a hundred yards, hurling himself through the bitter water with a savage intentness upon his goal. Then, without warning, a pain like the stab of a flint knife constricted his belly, empty of food this long while. Cramps seized his legs and arms; his eyes, frantic and bloodshot, rolled with dumb agony.

He could not draw breath to cry out. He was helpless, his lungs seeming to give way and collapse, a giant's hammer pounding at his temples. Then came a very miracle from the gods.

A wool-white cloud of mist, borne on the wings of a sweeping icy squall, swept down the narrow lake arm. The fantastic thing leaped straight for him and

upon him; the water heaved around; a ripple of wavelets struck him; a drifting mass of icy particles hit him and skittered around. With the swishing blast of the squall came the rumble of subdued thunder, which faded and passed away among the peaks. And upon the thunder, a voice:

"Fight! *Fight!* I'll help you!"

The gods had spoken! Shorty, gnawing his blue lips to blood, struggled with new and frantic life. His hands kept him up as they flailed the water, but the numbing chill had crept into his heart, and the cramps were agonizing. Yet the gods had spoken!

NO gods, had he known it, but the woman there beside her kill, watching him, shrieking at him as the squall struck and passed above him, leaving him still struggling in the water. Redfur of the Cave Folk, screaming her impulsive, eager encouragement at this man alone. Seeing him stricken, then swept by the squall and still adrift, her first exultant laughter passed into admiration.

Clutching the long bone knife, arms bloodied to the elbow, she stood at the water's edge, breasts heaving, hair flying, eyes blazing. This man was fighting the universal enemy, the gods of mountain, sky and water; deep instinct sent her to help this fellow-animal.

Like all her mountain folk, she hated and feared the water. She called out to the man, again and again. He renewed his feeble struggles, only to go under. Anger upburst within her. She waded out into the lake knee-deep, shook her knife, cursed the water, the glaciers, the snow-locked peaks. Suddenly a new and deeper cry broke from her lips, a cry that reached and rang across to the drowning figure:

"Behind you! Look behind you, man!"

Shorty, half-frozen and nearly helpless, twisted his head in sharp quick fear, only to see that the huge shape close upon him was no enemy, but part of a waterlogged tree, broken off and adrift, barely showing above the water. His clawing fingers reached for it, clutched at it, caught and held.

Sobbing out sharp breaths, he rested and then pulled himself to it, stretching out full length. He waved a hand at the woman; she shook her knife in response, a wild and exultant gesture. Shorty grinned. The cramps were leaving him now. Those mighty shoulders of

REDFUR

his had drawn him to safety, but he was chilled through, and very numb. The biting wind struck him, knife-like.

He lifted his head, blinking at the shore. The woman was waving her arms at him, swinging them; she came knee-deep into the water again, pawing at it, slapping it, shouting at him. Shorty wondered if she was stark crazy. Scowling, he heard her shout to do the same thing.

Puzzled, he put out an arm and imitated her action, though unable to see any sense in it. Freezing as it was, the water was still warmer than the air, and for an instant felt good to his hand. He dipped in the other hand to get the same pleasant effect, paddling and thrusting.

Suddenly he realized that this motion of his arms made the log move.

It burst upon him full force, momentarily stunning him with the comprehension. Why, the woman had brains! He could move the thing, make it swim; and frantically he fell to work, with all his furious intensity of strength.

Blood resumed its circulation, and feeling returned to his numbed body. He

The woman was down, half senseless; the hairy giant, about to pick her up, wheeled as the little man drove for him. His club swung.

waved at the woman and uttered a yelp of delight. He was moving the log, propelling it toward shore—very slowly, but surely. And the fresh raw meat was there, reaching out to him, inviting him!

His whole store of energy went into the job: flailing away like a madman, he gradually moved the log inshore until he could glimpse the bottom. Then he flopped off, gasped as he came into the water again, staggered shoreward. His eyes clouded, and he collapsed as he neared the snow-bound beach, Redfur, whimpering eagerly, dashed out and caught him, dragged him ashore, helped him past the ice to the bare ground.

SHORTY was utterly exhausted. The hands of Redfur seized him; he tried to fight her off and could not. He stood swaying, until he realized that she was trying to help and guide him. More dead than alive, he stumbled on among the trees, while she pushed and shoved and dragged. Twice he went down, but she pummeled him until he came staggering up again in anger. Then he fell, and remembered nothing more. . . .

When he wakened again, Shorty the outcast found the morning sun tinting mountain peaks and glaciers with a roseate glow. The smell of wood-smoke was in his nostrils; the smell of cooking meat aroused him. He found a rabbit-skin robe about him, and drew it closer. He was warm and joyous, despite his empty belly.

Fire, food, a woman! He had everything. Dimly he recalled how she had rubbed him, fed him, shoved him down into dreamless slumber. . . . He spoke sharply:

"Woman! *Woman!*"

No answer. He sniffed the air; no sign of her that way. He flung off the robe and sat up. He was lying in a shallow little cave, a fire outside it. Nothing here to indicate another presence. He leaped up and strode outside.

Fire embers among stones, a rude clay pot holding cooked meat; nothing else. The trees, dark and dismal, hemmed him in. The woman had gone. He cursed his heavy slumber. Gone! Then he had no woman after all, damn it! But she had left the meat. He started for it—and halted abruptly, his animal senses suddenly alert.

A slight sound reached him. He glanced around for a weapon, found none, then crouched at one side of the cave mouth, listening. Something was there among the trees of the slope. Ah! The woman! She came suddenly into

full sight. A small deer was flung over her shoulder; in the girdle about her hips was the long bone knife. Shorty felt a wild, ecstatic glow take hold of him.

HE stepped out into the open. The deer fell; the bone knife flashed out; then she recognized him and relaxed. Shorty grinned, and his grin was a thing to like at first sight.

"Who are you?" he grunted. "Cave Folk?"

"No; I've left them, I'm alone," she said. "Redfur."

"Good name, Redfur. Suits you. I'm Shorty—got kicked out because I don't like fish. I'm on my own. Redfur, you're all right!"

He came to her, caught hold of her, put his arm about her shoulders and looked into her face. His arm tightened—then she twisted free, fetching him a sound clip that knocked him sprawling.

He leaped erect, met her angry defiance with a snarl, and balanced for the leap. She had drawn her bone knife and was poised to meet him, a flame of anger in her eyes. Shorty was on the very point of springing, when he rocked back suddenly on his heels. Fear and terror froze him. The hulking, shambling thing behind her, following the scent of fresh blood—a bear, just out of winter hibernation, ravenously hungry, still soft-pawed but enormous.

"Look out!" Shorty found voice. "Old man of the caves! Jump for it! Grab the tree-branch above you. Then throw me the knife. Quick!"

A ruse on his part? Redfur darted one quick glance over her shoulder, and saw the beast, rolling forward and almost upon her. With one cry she was in the air, leaping for the limb overhead, springing upward with frantic velocity. She caught the branch, twisted her lithe body, swung up astride the limb. The huge beast reared up underneath, pawing at her, growling and slavering.

Then, whirling, the bear blinked at Shorty and went for him.

Redfur had dropped the bone knife, but Shorty could not reach it in time. He had the cave behind him, and no refuge except flight; but Shorty was not the man to run for it and leave meat and woman behind. He dodged the first vicious swing and back-swing of those huge paws. A claw caught and ripped his shoulder. No running for it, now! That apparently clumsy creature could run down any man.

Dodging, ducking, sent sprawling by a swipe of the huge paw, Shorty reeled over and was up again. He had the knife now, and the shambling beast had him, was hard upon him, was reaching for him. He lunged desperately, sank the long splinter-like bone to the very grip in the fur and skin and flesh of the throat. Then he went down and knew himself lost. . . .

With this, something happened—a tremendous crash. Shorty somehow scrambled aside, squirmed clear. Redfur was out of the tree, had picked up a huge rock and smashed it home; now she was poising another, a fifty-pound jagged knot of rock. It drove home to the skull of the great brute and did its work. Shorty darted in, freed the bone knife, drove it again into the toppled carcass, and leaped away with agility from the flailing, dying paws.

Panting, he stared at Redfur in wild exultation. With skull crushed and throat pierced, a bear lay dead, an old man of the caves! Usually it took wild dogs and a dozen hunters to subdue one of these beasts.

"You and I—ha! We are good," said Shorty in delight.

"We are good," Redfur cried, her eyes ablaze.

"We go together. You are my woman, Redfur!" And he waved the reddened bone knife at her. He saw a change come into her face. Her mouth flew open; the blood ebbed from her cheeks; her excited eyes distended.

"Then prove it," she exclaimed. "Look!"

Shorty turned and saw them—two of them, Cave Folk, huge hairy men, padding down the slope among the trees, heading for them: one with knotted club the other with spear ready.

"After me—they've come after me!" gasped Redfur. "I ran away from them—"

Her words died in sudden stark fear. But Shorty braced himself, a snarl on his lips. His traditional enemies, were these Cave Folk, who raided the Fish-eaters and carried off girls and women. Bone knife against club and flint-tipped spear? So be it. This sliver of bone in his hand was a joyful thing.

THE two great hairy men came running straight in, yelping with eagerness, weapons poised. Shorty stood motionless, wary, alert. Spear came first; thrusting for him, darting at him to trans-

fix his body. He twisted quickly, crashed into the man behind it as he evaded the stroke, and the long bone knife lunged upward, driving home with savage force. The little wide-shouldered man was a sudden demon, ducking the club that swung for him, squirming away from the dying man, to plunge at the second foe full tilt.

That second giant slipped in the bear's blood, and Shorty had him in a flash, drove the long knife through his throat, jerked it loose, sprang away. The two of them were sprawled there; and a wild, fierce laugh broke from the killer.

"Proved it, Redfur!" he shouted joyously, and caught her long hair. "My woman!"

SHE whimpered and clung to him. Then she broke away, stood with hair astream, head flung back, breasts quivering, and pointed upward. Shorty looked. There above the cave on the ledge, another of the Cave Folk, who uttered a loud yell and then stood, waiting, staring down.

"My people—all of them! With dogs, to run me down!" Redfur cried out. "Too many for us, Shorty. Wait!"

She darted into the cave and came out again, the robe of rabbit-skins over her shoulder. A robe, at such a moment? From Shorty broke a laugh.

"To the forest?" he exclaimed.

She dissented.

"The dogs—no! They would run us down. There is only one way. Come!"

Shorty was very far from comprehension, but he knew well enough that to face that pack of Cave Folk, with their wild dogs, were sheer folly. To run from them were useless. This woman had brains, so he fell in beside her and saved his breath. What a woman she was! Pride swelled within him as he eyed her lithe bronze body, her blazing eyes, her firm loveliness.

The lake glittered before them, and the shore of the arm that Shorty remembered from last night. If she had grabbed up the fur robe, he had snatched meat from her clay pot. He tore at it with his teeth, gave her part of it, and came to a halt.

"Well?"

"The tree," she gasped out. "We must go in the water."

"Ha!" Shorty leaped exultant to the idea. "To my people, yes! Kick me out, will they? I'll show them a thing or two—bringing back a woman and a knife like this! I said you had brains. Come along, then."

They moved—halted, looked at each other, then at the shore, where boulders broke the snow and ice. No log here, no fallen tree. It was gone.

"Find another!" she cried sharply. "Look—"

Shorty glanced back, and growled. The pack, indeed! Moving figures, outspread among the trees; the eager, excited tongues of half-wild dogs. One figure, dog leashed close, ahead of the others, was leaping and slithering along with the animal.

Redfur had darted away, running desperately along the snow and rocks that fringed the lake-edge, and Shorty darted after. She leaped from boulder to boulder like a wild chamois, but Shorty found himself failing. He had done yeoman's work this day; he was battered and ripped; his feet left red stains in the snow.

Glancing back, he saw that hairy giant with his leashed wild dog coming with great bounds, holding a long splay-ended club in his free hand and swinging it like a toy. Shorty lowered his shaggy head and stumbled forward. He squinted ahead among the jagged boulders where Redfur had disappeared; they were larger here, jutting masses of rock. He lifted his hoarse voice and called.

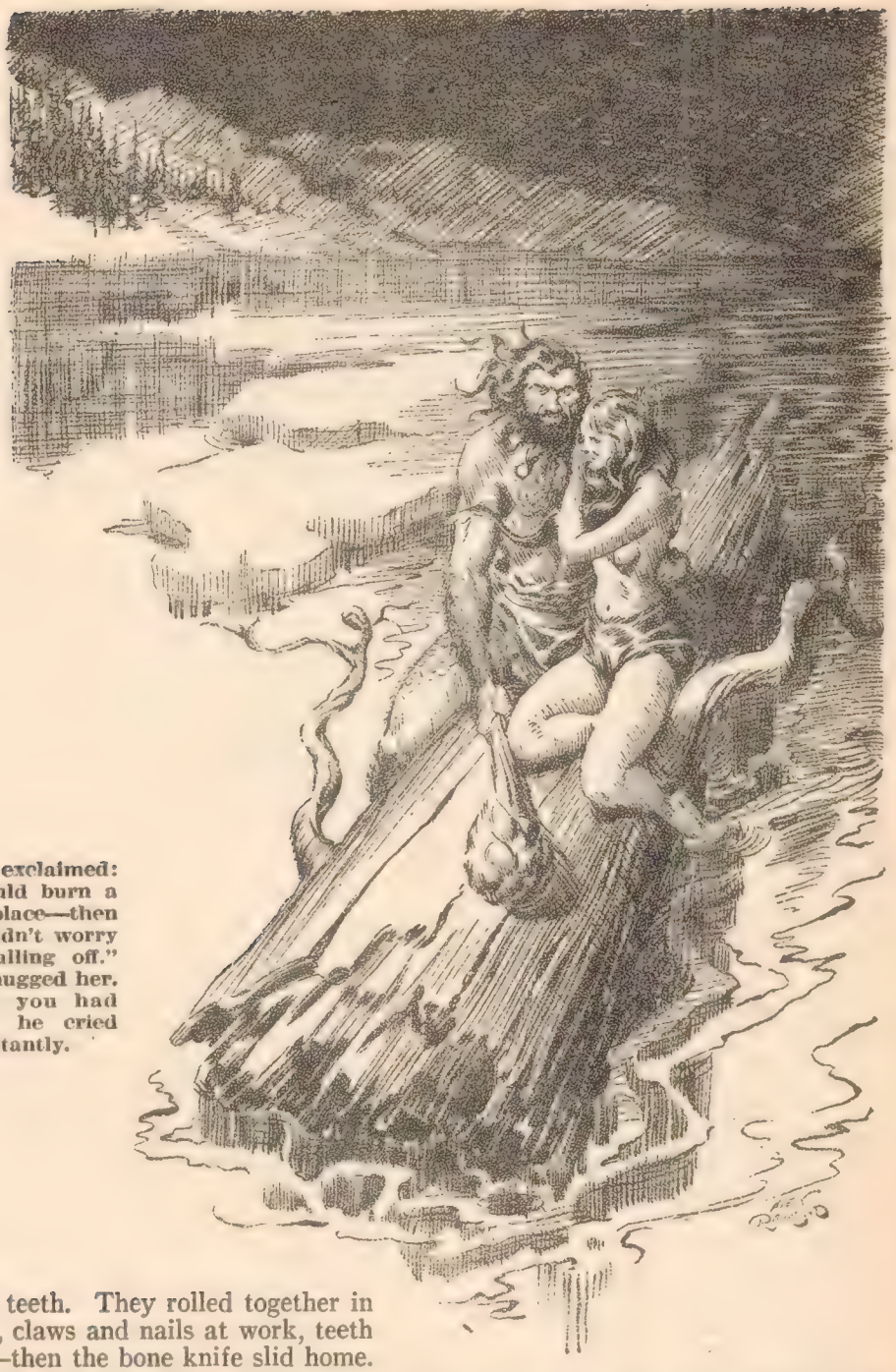
Then he had his answer. He came into sight of her, perched on a great boulder, all agleam in the clean hot sunlight like a bronze goddess, against the blue of the water. She waved to him, called him on, and Shorty plunged forward.

He pounded down to the boulder; she slipped from it, and pointed to a great broken tree, one end fastened in the snow, the other adrift.

"Hurry! It's too big for me to move—I tried it."

Together they bent to the task, grunting, shoving, breaking the tree loose. It cracked clear of the snow and ice; it moved. . . . Then lifted a sudden wild yell from behind. The man and the slavering dog were upon them.

REDFUR wheeled and stood with teeth bared, a cornered animal. Shorty whipped out the bone knife, had a glimpse of that hairy giant leaping forward, was aware of the dog loosed and hurtling at his throat. He stabbed ineffectually; the weight of the animal knocked him backward. Hairy arm helped; the shaggy beard saved his throat and caught the



Redfur exclaimed: "We could burn a hollow place—then we wouldn't worry about falling off." Shorty hugged her. "I said you had brains!" he cried exultantly.

gleaming teeth. They rolled together in the snow, claws and nails at work, teeth slashing—then the bone knife slid home.

Shorty lurched to his feet, glaring.

The woman was down, half senseless, the hairy giant about to pick her up in one hand and fling her body over his shoulder. He wheeled about as the little wide-shouldered man drove for him. His club swung; but Redfur awakened. She bit and clawed savagely, so that the huge Cave-man dropped her.

Shorty dodged the clumsy sweep of the club, and struck. The knife plunged into the bulging chest. The giant's free hand fetched him a buffet that knocked him headlong, sending him sliding and sprawling ten feet away, with blood running from ears and nostrils. But when he scrambled up, Shorty saw that great hairy figure collapsed beside the dead dog—snarling, and plucking feebly at the bone knife still fast in the wound.

Then Redfur, catching up the fallen splay-bladed club, swung it once and settled what her mate had begun. She spat at the dead thing and freed the bone

knife, and caught Shorty in her arms as he came staggering back.

"Good! You're good, Shorty!" she gasped out. "Quick, now—"

They bent to the log again. He took the club from her and used it as a lever, and the huge fallen tree was afloat. One protruding branch remained. With the club, Shorty smashed this off. The tree was long dead—pithy, it floated light.

A baying of dogs, a wild outburst of voices—the pursuit was swift and close upon them. Redfur scrambled onto the log, and Shorty pushed at it, shoving it out, sending it away with one thrust of his powerful shoulders. He waded out after it. A spear went past his shoulder. He planted his feet deep, set the club against the log, shoved mightily again—then flung himself after.

CLUB still in hand, he caught the end of the surging, drifting log, and after a moment hauled himself up. Redfur, jubilant, was standing erect and jeering back at the Cave Folk. These, in utter blank amazement, fringed the shore, staring, cursing, bellowing threats. Some of them fell to work heaving stones; but already the log was drifting well out. Shorty jeered and cursed, capered, shook the club, and finally dropped with joyous exhaustion. Safe!

Bloody and battered, he grinned at Redfur, and she broke into an excited laugh.

"Your people—suppose they kick us out?"

"Let 'em try!" said Shorty with a grin, and touched his club. "Just let 'em try, Redfur! They're a pack of rabbits. Any man who can kill bears and Cave-men can master the lot of them; especially with you to help. Woman, you've got brains!"

"So have you." And she laughed again, happily. "But we'll never get there just by floating in the lake. Shall we use our hands?"

Shorty frowned. He picked up the splay-bladed club and tapped the log; solid and wide, this log; a little tippy, but safe enough. He reached the club down into the water and then again, to see how the club floated.

"Shorty!" exclaimed Redfur suddenly. "Do that again!"

"Huh? Do what?" he grunted, staring at her.

"*That!* With the club, in the water."

Shorty dipped the club; and then was aware that the log moved a little to the thrust. Surprise leaped in his face; a quick, eager laugh broke from Redfur. Once again; the log surged ahead a little.

"It's like a hand, Shorty!" the woman cried. "You move it back, push against the water, and we move forward!"

Like a hand indeed. Pleased as a buck deer with a new set of antlers, Shorty flailed away. The log moved and moved. The ripples and the ice-chunks stirred past them and fell slowly behind.

The daylight died; the cold stars came out. Imperceptibly, but steadily, the log now was creeping across the wide lake. They would get across by morning; Shorty looked forward with grim intentness to the meeting with his own folk again.

Redfur, who had been taking her turn with the club-paddle, joined him in the middle of the log; they huddled together for warmth. Redfur scooped at the rough bark with her hand.

"Look—we could do that!" she exclaimed. "We could put fire on it and burn a hollow place to lie. Then we wouldn't worry about falling off."

Shorty hugged her tightly. "I said you had brains!" he cried exultantly.

The first boat, the first paddle, had been found.

A SHARP mill-whistle, blasting five-o'clock closing-time, jerked me out of my musings in the past, recalled me to the shipyard and the oily, dirty creek. The stick still floated there, around and around, with the insect clinging to it.

Old Cap'n Powers, who had fallen fast asleep in the warm sunlight, straightened up with a jerk. He eyed me guiltily, and fumbled for his lost pipe.

"Hey? What was that you was talking about?" he demanded. "Oh, sure; that there hoppergrass on the stick—the first original sailor-man! But here's a queer thing, matey: It aint what he does when he gets on the stick and begins to navigate, that sticks in my gizzard. The question is, how did he come to get on that there stick in the first place, and shove out from shore? And if you ask me, I'll bet you a dollar ag'in' a Mexican cent, that there's a lady grasshopper in it some place!"

And thinking of Redfur of the Cave Folk, I knew that Cap'n Powers was dead right.

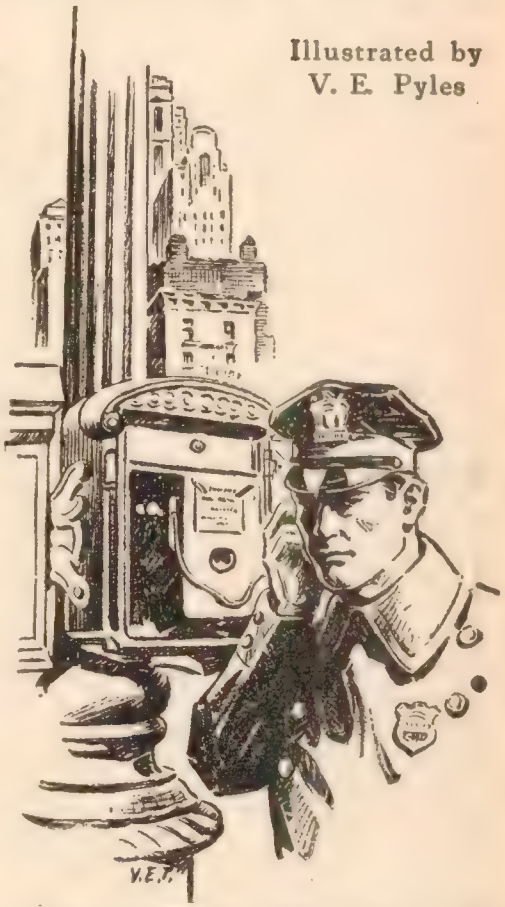
The first sail forms the basis of the second story in this series—a tale even more exceptional than the foregoing.

A Full Day's Work

A stirring drama of metropolitan police work, by a one-time police reporter who knows—the author of the famous Tiny David stories.

By
ROBERT R. MILL

Illustrated by V. E. Pyles



THE roar of the uptown traffic on the avenue was deafening. The whole great city of Wellsport was going home, apparently; moving from the downtown section like a tired but victorious army.

Breasting the surge of this army, came Patrolman Thomas Brady, outwardly calm, unruffled and good-humored, his blue eyes twinkling under the visor of his uniform cap.

(Brady, incidentally, is not his real name. For though he did nothing to be ashamed of, certain incidents of this story might get him into trouble just the same.)

Standing before a box painted green, Brady inserted a key, and spoke into the telephone the box contained, reporting to the Sergeant in a station-house five blocks away. But the twinkle faded from his eyes as he stepped away from the box, prepared to play his part in a little drama that was enacted almost every evening at this same time. It had been pleasant comedy in the past, this little drama. Today, to one, at least, of the participants, it would be tragedy. He squared his shoulders.

A girl who had been standing in the shelter of a doorway braved the rushing throng and made her way toward him. She was a striking girl, one whose freshness stood out from the cosmetic-aided charms of the other girls hurrying by her. She paused uncertainly before the patrolman.

"Pardon me, Officer—"

"Yes, miss."

He paused, one finger at the visor of his cap, in that attentive and courteous manner required by the manual when a patrolman receives a request for information from a citizen.

Her red lips twitched as she continued:

"I am a stranger in this section of the city. Perhaps you can direct me to this address?"

He took the slip of paper, unfolded it, and there was a suspicion of a mist over his blue eyes as he read the message:

"I love you, Tom."

"Yes, miss." His voice was almost harsh as he struggled to control his emotion. "It's a small street, over here toward the east." His massive thumb pointed down the cross-street toward the distant river, where the faint hooting of whistles added a minor refrain to the symphonic roar of the city. "My beat lies over that way. If you would care to walk along, it would be much easier to show you than direct you."

"Oh, thank you, Officer."

They fell into step side by side, carried forward in the press, almost without effort on their part. Her trim pumps matched each stride of his heavy, square-toed brogans.

Another avenue, more tawdry than the one to the west. . . . Dingy wholesale establishments instead of the vulgarly aggressive shops. . . . Nondescript brick buildings—perhaps modest dwellings, but outwardly sinister. . . .

"It is not far now, miss."

"Thank you, Officer."

They turned south into a little street which, if its existence had not been limited to two short blocks, might have been designated as an avenue. There were rows of brick-fronted houses, as alike as peas in a pod. Fire-escapes straddled the fronts. Children thronged the street. Frowsy women peered from doorways and windows.

THE girl paused before a door that opened on a hallway of imitation marble. She glanced hastily about, seeing familiar faces:

The old woman across the street, who thanked Tom Brady that her son was working in a coal-yard and not a reform-school shop. . . . The youth with the twisted leg, who some day would walk straight because this same policeman had led a great surgeon into a street which the surgeon was unaware existed. . . . The hard-working mother next door, whose daughter, after a talk with Brady the "copper," had decided her job in a factory was to be preferred to a certain apartment uptown, which had conditions attached. . . . Men and women who knew him as Tom Brady, and liked him. A cop, yes, but a fine lad and, in a district like this, where the very destiny of simple lives is held in the hands of the policeman on the beat, almost a god. No danger of any of these people slipping a word to a sergeant that a certain patrolman was talking to a girl while on duty.

So the girl dropped the pretense, and faced him with a worried look.

"Tom, something is wrong. Tell me what it is."

His resolution to keep this from her faded before the urgency in her eyes. He fumbled in his tunic, found a paper that had been torn from a clicking teletype machine in the station-house a few hours before, and handed it to her:

DEPARTMENTAL ORDER

PATROLMAN THOMAS E. BRADY IS HEREBY TRANSFERRED FROM THE SEVENTH PRECINCT TO THE FORTY-FOURTH. SAID TRANSFER IS FOR THE GOOD OF THE SERVICE, AND IS EFFECTIVE TOMORROW.

Her dark eyes were clouded.

"Tom, what does it mean?"

He swung his night-stick at an unoffending garbage-can.

"Just this, Rose: They've sent me out to the sticks, out with the goats."

"But why, Tom?"

His voice was hard.

"I had it coming, Rose. I tangled with the floating crap game last night. Three nights ago they took old man Mosciny clean. They got the money that was to have taken his sister up to the mountains. He had worked for it, begged for it, and even if he had done a bit of larceny in getting it together, I would have been the last man to raise my voice. But they got a drink or two into him, and it was easy picking after that."

He lowered his voice.

"They moved the game to the Pastime Social Club last night. A kid I had done a favor for, slipped me the dope." His shoulders squared. "I couldn't get old Mosciny's money back, but I could give those rats the works."

Her eyes were large with fear and wonder.

"But that's Honest Mike Cassidy's club, Tom!"

He laughed bitterly.

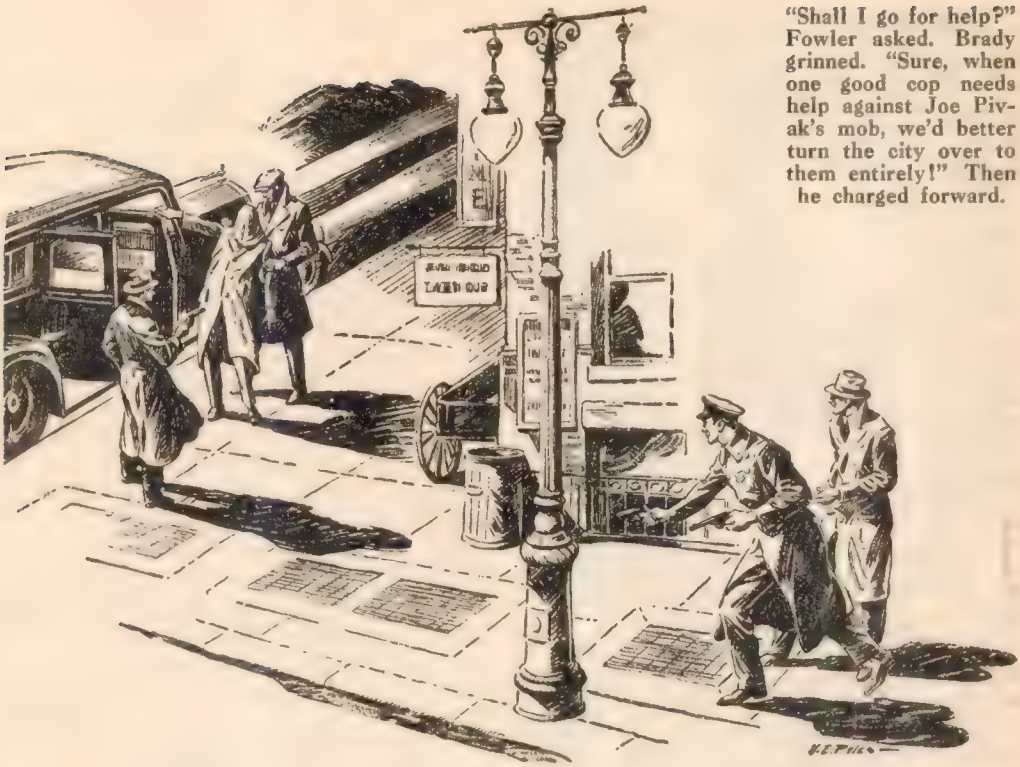
"You're telling me, Rose! Three thousand members. Every member votes at least once, and all the votes are the way Cassidy calls them. That's a lot of votes for a flatfoot to kick in the teeth."

His big hands rested upon her shoulders, with the night-stick, attached to one of his wrists with a leather thong, hanging at her side.

"Rose, I would like to claim an alibi by telling you I was a bit out of my head when I did it, but that wouldn't be on the up-and-up. I knew what I was doing. There was plenty of time, for when I tried to get Costello, the man on the next beat, to go in on it with me, he shied away from it as if it was a tommy-gun. I knew it was having you, or getting the rats that had cleaned old man Mosciny. I guess getting the rats seemed more important, for get them I did."

HE hesitated, and when he spoke, his voice was low.

"It was a bum decision, Rose—bum every way you take it. I knew that as soon as the Sergeant got there with the wagon. He loaded up what I'd grabbed—and I grabbed only big shots—because he had to, but he did everything except



"Shall I go for help?" Fowler asked. Brady grinned. "Sure, when one good cop needs help against Joe Pivak's mob, we'd better turn the city over to them entirely!" Then he charged forward.

ask them if they didn't want to drive through the park. The magistrate threw the cases out of the window. Lack of supporting evidence, and all that! If he didn't apologize to the rats in the courtroom, he did in his chambers. And then this order came through. So it was a bum decision all around."

Now her hands were upon his broad shoulders. Her eyes were shining.

"No, it wasn't, Tom, not if you wanted it to appeal to me. If you hadn't played it the way you did, I wouldn't be speaking to you now."

BRADY drew her into the shelter of the doorway, and took her in his arms. When he spoke, his voice was muffled by her hair.

"That helps, Rose. I sort of thought you'd feel that way. But we're licked."

"We are not!" Her voice was defiant. Her fists were clenched. "Why are we?" There was a faint note of hesitation in the question.

"The apartment around the corner is out." His words were clipped, brusque. "They don't run special trains between here and the Forty-fourth Precinct. I work a copper's hours, not a banker's. The trip would take longer than my tour of duty." He peered at her eyes as he asked: "You couldn't—or wouldn't—leave the old neighborhood, Rose?"

She met the question frankly.

"No, Tom, I couldn't. Not as long as Father lives."

His shoulders sagged.

"You see, Rose? All we have left is what we can save out of the wreck. I'll be out in the sticks on my job, and you'll be here on yours. There'll be no girl waiting for me to direct her to a street she has lived in for almost twenty years! But there will be that newspaper guy to wait for you."

"Tom Brady!" Her hands clutched the lapels of his coat as she tried to shake him. The imps of mischief that sparkled in her eyes banished for the moment the look of dejection upon her face. "Listen to me. I'll tell you something I swore I never would." Her lips were smiling. "A poor girl has to have some tricks up her sleeve when her boy is a copper, and has red hair in the bargain."

She was serious as she continued:

"Jimmy Fowler is a peach of a boy, —but he is not for me. *My* boy wears a blue uniform. He always will be my boy, come what will—and Jimmy Fowler knows that. We had it all out, Tom. He can lose just as graciously as he can win. He said to tell you that the best man had won. He said—and he wasn't trying to wise-crack—that an honest cop was one of the finest things God ever made.

The scowling youth's protest ended abruptly.

He said that he would fade out of the picture, and stay out, unless some time he could come back just long enough to help either you or me."

Brady cleared his throat.

"I'm sorry, Rose. Jimmy is a square-shooter. Every man on the force says that. I can't take my lickings the way he does. It makes me sore clean through—sore at the whole world, when I should be sore at the system. I try to take it out on Jimmy Fowler, when I should take it out on the system, the whole rotten works."

He smote his open palm with a huge fist.

"Lord, I would like to be able to go out and do that for just one day! I want to go out and do a cop's job as it should be done, and as I could do it. It would make me able to look the whole world in the face. If I had even one day of that, I wouldn't care what happened. It would be worth it."

She looked up excitedly.

"You can have it, Tom! Don't you see? This is your last day here; they've done all they can to you. Now you are free to do what you want!"

SHE was a girl transformed. Miss Rose McNeil, the suave, poised automaton—a part of the machinery of a quiet, decorous office—became once more Rosie McNeil, child of the tenements.

This child of the tenements was a prophetess with a flaming sword. The fire that sparkled about that sword was kindled by the years of her childhood in the slums, years of oppression and injustice, yet years in which the torch of courage had burned constantly, now to burst into full flame.

"Go out and get them, Tom! Get the lying, whining hypocrites. Get them on both sides of the fence. Get the ones who are always talking about law and order, and using their high position to violate the law themselves. Get the ones who are openly outside the law because somebody inside it is willing to profit by their breaking it. Get them all, Tom. You have a full day to get them. You are immune; they can't touch you; they have done all they can."

He hesitated, stirred by the fervor of her plea.

"What would it get me, Rose? They would toss the cases out the window so fast you would need three nets to catch them."

The light still burned in her eyes.

"Sure they will," she agreed, "if you try it alone. But there is one thing these rats are more afraid of than anything else: That is a plain, unvarnished account of themselves, printed on white paper with black ink, and served at breakfast with the coffee and rolls. We'll get Jimmy Fowler in on this with us. He'll do it for me, and he'll love it. He's that kind of a boy."

Her voice broke.

"What can they do to us, Tom? They've done all they can. But we'll always have each other."

She half led, half pushed him toward the telephone pay-station in the dimly lit hall. . . .

The bright young men on the staff of the *Star,* as their long-suffering city editor frequently said, never did things by halves. When they worked, they did it intensely. When they played, they employed the same measure of enthusiasm.

The city desk, with its three telephones, was deserted. The desks of two reporters had been closed and pulled together. About the desks were grouped the editors, reporters, rewrite men and copy-readers not engaged for the moment in pursuing that perishable commodity, news. In the hands of these gentlemen were playing-cards, and upon the desks before them lay various coins of the realm.

A sleepy-looking copy-boy put aside a tabloid and answered a telephone on the city desk. He cupped his hand over the mouthpiece and called toward the group around the desk:

"Is Mr. Fowler in?"

A tall, thin young man looked up.

"Mr. Fowler," he answered, "is in for two dollars and thirty cents. He hopes to get out with his shirt. Who is taking this much interest in him?"

"It's a dame."

"That," said the reporter, "means less than nothing. Which dame?"

The boy turned his attention to the telephone.

"It's Miss McNeil," he reported.

"Mr. Fowler is in," the reporter directed. "He will talk to Miss McNeil. He will talk to her from a booth, thereby depriving you of the pleasure of listening to a conversation that is bound to be uplifting, educational and entertaining."

FIVE minutes later he emerged from the booth obviously excited, and strode over to the card-players.

"I'll take two of your best," the city editor instructed the dealer.

"Not this time!" Jimmy Jexford Fowler brushed by his city editor, perched upon the desk, scattering cards and money, and faced his superior.

"Listen, Steve! Did you ever dream of impossible things you would like to see come true? So have I. I've often wondered what would happen if a cop went out, forgot who should be arrested and who shouldn't, and honestly enforced the law. Oh, I don't mean pestering the public by picking up every petty violator of every obscure ordinance. I mean things that count, but things that just aren't done in the best police circles in this man's town."

The city editor rescued his fallen cards.

"Get out of the way, Jimmy. I thought that out, and got the answer, when I was a cub. They send the cop out to the sticks where he won't bother anybody."

"Suppose," the reporter persisted, "the cop is on his way there, but has one more day, and plans to spend the day doing what I referred to in my previous communication—please mention File Number Six in your reply."

THE city editor yawned.

"I know all the answers, Jimmy. In that case, before he could get started, some citizen would notice a man acting queerly; he'd call a sane cop, who would call an ambulance, and a man in white would tell the queer-acting man to come along quietly, and they would end up in a room that has double doors and lots of padding."

"This guy," the reporter interrupted, "has been pushed around so much he just doesn't care. There is a girl in it, too. He is going through with it. And he is as sane as I am."

"That last statement," said the city editor, "kills the interest your first statement inspired." But the cards were forgotten now.

"He is as sane as the owner of this paper," protested the reporter.

"Now I am even less interested," said the city editor.

The reporter made a gesture of resignation.

"You win. He is as sane as *you* are, Steve. He is going through with it, and little Jimmy Fowler is going to be right with him. It's a dream come true. Will you be standing by to give me what I ask for, Steve?"

The city editor left the question unanswered.

"So long, Jimmy." His voice was caustic. "Give my regards to Dr. Merton. He is still head of the Psychopathic Department."

But when Fowler had departed, he turned to his assistant.

"You can go home, George. I am staying on." He wheeled upon the men he had been playing cards with a moment before. "Get this mess cleaned up. What is this—a newspaper shop or a corner poolroom?"

He slid into position behind the city desk.

"Tell the art department to stand by with photographers ready."

He pulled the telephones toward him.

"Boy!" he called.

He sat gazing out the window at the towering buildings, some windows of which were beginning to blaze with light.

"A dream come true," he murmured.

He looked up to find a boy waiting.

"Black coffee," he barked. "What are you grinning at, you ape?"

THEY met on a quiet corner near the river. Outwardly, both men were casual, almost gruff.

"Hello, Brady."

"Hello, Fowler." A pause. "Nice of you to come in on this mess."

The reporter grinned, a crooked little grin.

"Hell, I haven't had as much fun since I covered the bankers' trials. Let's get going."

They walked north until they reached an ornate apartment-house standing out among tenements, the vanguard of a reclaimed section of the city. They paused before an expensive limousine parked at the curb.

"This," said Brady, "is the car of Gregory Nilds."

"And this," said the reporter, studying a sign attached to a lamp-post near the car, "seems to be a police-department notice stating that parking is not permitted in this block at any time."

The policeman tied a yellow ticket to the front doorknob of the car.

"Yellow and maroon certainly blend nicely," commented the reporter.

"It won't stick," was the bitter remark of the policeman. "Nilds is the chairman of the Committee of Twenty. They investigate vice, and get out reports telling that conditions are due to dishonest cops. He'll tear up the ticket and make a phone-call. When I go down to Traffic Court tomorrow, will my face be red!"

He made an impatient gesture.

"I wouldn't bother with this, Fowler, but it is the first slap in the face every cop gets. He learns that the law applies to some persons, and not to others. The system begins right here. If the cop doesn't play along, he gets slapped back into place. If he does play, he gets a cigar now and then, and perhaps five dollars at Christmas. But it teaches him that he has something to sell, and that those things are being sold. After that, if he has brains, he sells other things, and to the highest bidder."

A flush crossed his broad face.

"I can't explain the thing right, but do you get what I am driving at?"

"Yes," the reporter said, "I do. Your explanation makes Nilds' car a symbol. A symbol rates a picture. When we publish a picture of the car showing the license-plate and the tag, I am afraid the tag will stick. Hold your breath while I duck into that drug-store and call the office to send out one of what we jokingly call our photographers."

He was gone all of fifteen minutes. He was shaking his head regretfully as he returned.

"This car is here every evening, isn't it?"

"Yes," said the policeman.

"Well, you are wrong about Nilds owning the car. Clerk in the drug-store told me it belongs to a Mr. John Jones. Mr. Jones calls on a lady in the apartment there every evening. The lady was once with the 'Foibles'—for a brief period of time—but she has been at liberty, as we theatrical people say, for over two years. In fact, she hasn't tried to land an engagement since Mr. Jones began to call."

HE frowned upon the policeman.

"So you were wrong, Brady. Mr. Nilds, the chairman of the Committee of Twenty, wouldn't be mixed up in anything like that! Just to show you how wrong you are, I told the office to send a reporter with the photographer. After they get through with the car, they will call on the young lady for a picture and an interview—about her stage career, you know."

He hooked his arm in Brady's.

"We aren't interested in Mr. Nilds' private life. Maybe you are right; maybe the druggist is. That's none of my business. But in one column of tomorrow's paper will be a picture of the car and a story about where it was parked. In the next column will be the picture and story from the charming 'Foibles' queen. It won't mean a thing to anybody except you and me—and perhaps Mr. Nilds."

He paused to light a cigarette.

"Lead on, MacDuff. Lead on, before I break down laughing."

They walked along a sidewalk through a narrow lane formed by packing-cases piled four high on both sides. More cases were being added to the piles by work-

men who issued from an establishment, the front window of which bore the legend, *"Milton J. Froback, Wholesale Drygoods."*

Ten feet ahead of them, a frightened boy leaped to safety just as one of the cases toppled and fell.

"Get the hell out of here!" roared a foreman. "Walk in the street, or go on the other side."

He winked at Brady for encouragement.

The patrolman took a step forward.

"Get these cases off the sidewalk," he ordered.

The foreman stared at him in amazement.

"What?"

The order was repeated.

"Are you crazy?" asked the foreman.

Brady was standing beside him.

"You heard me. Snap into it. If you don't, I'll run you in."

The foreman retreated.

"Call the boss," he shouted over his shoulder.

Milton Froback emerged from the establishment—a fussy little man, with white mutton-chop whiskers.

"What's all this?" he demanded.

The foreman told him. Froback wheeled upon the policeman.

"My advice to you, my good man, is to move on about your business. I have taken this matter up with your captain and with Mr. Cassidy. We have an—er—an understanding."

Brady stood his ground.

"This is a public sidewalk," he retorted. "It is against the law to block it. Cases piled this way are dangerous to passers-by. And you have two fireplugs blocked. The cases go out—and right now!"

"The cases stay, and *you* go!" roared Froback. "I—"

FOWLER stepped from behind a case, and advanced, hand outstretched.

"Good evening, Mr. Froback. I am Fowler, of the *Star*. Haven't seen you for some time—not since I covered that speech you made before the Law and Order League."

He smiled blandly.

"That was a swell speech! Lots of good lines in it. I still remember some of them:

"'The day of special privilege is over, and to each citizen is to be accorded the rights that formerly belonged to the few. . . . The lords of the underworld thrived on special privilege, and our police, all too often, gave it to them.'"

Mr. Froback's face had assumed a hue somewhere between dark red and purple. He forced a smile.

"Nice of you to recall my small efforts," he declared. "I was just explaining to the officer that these cases are to be moved immediately." He turned to the puzzled foreman. "They shouldn't have been put there in the first place. Now, not a word. Get them out of here right away."

ONE block away, Fowler and Brady leaned against a wall and roared with laughter.

"That's enough of our best people," the reporter declared. "Now let's get after some nice, clean crooks."

"All right," the policeman agreed. "And here's a start."

Hand upraised, he ran out into the street toward an approaching car. It was a huge car, painted a battleship gray, and it bore a low license-number. At its wheel was a little man with narrow, shifty eyes. On the rear seat reclined a huge man, his jowls buried in the collar of an expensive coat.

The car drew to a halt.

"What's the joke?" demanded the man at the wheel.

"Get out," ordered Brady. "Get out, before I pull you out."

His big hand found the collar of the driver and pulled him to the street. Practiced hands slipped over the small man's body.

"I thought so!"

Brady pulled a revolver from a shoulder-holster.

The big man, with an agility at odds with his size, vaulted to the street. There was a puzzled scowl upon his face.

"Are you on the hop?" he demanded. "This won't get you—"

"Stick 'em up!" came the curt order. The muzzle of a revolver found a resting-place in the paunch of the big man. A quick search revealed no weapons on his person.

"I thought so," was Brady's comment, "Get in," he ordered the driver. "You get in too," he told the big man, "and I'll get in with you. Now we are going for a nice drive over to the station-house. And in case you aren't sure about the way there, just remember that a bullet in the back of the neck hurts a lot."

The starting of the car silenced the protest of the big man.

The desk sergeant looked up with awe and disbelief.

"I am booking Monk Early on a gun charge," said Brady, pushing the driver forward. "And I am holding Dutch Smaltz for investigation." His thumb indicated the big man.

The pen of the desk sergeant remained motionless. "Act your age," he cautioned. "You can't—"

Then Fowler, who had followed in a taxicab, stepped forward.

"Hello, Sergeant! Quite a story you have here. This copper landed our leading gangster and his bodyguard. Well, I can't stay now, but I'll be in first thing in the morning to see them. They'll both be here, won't they? You always hold them without bail for twenty-four hours when they are booked for investigation, don't you?"

The Sergeant knew when he was whipped. He began to fill out two forms. He muttered something that sounded like, "Got to do—"

"May I see you outside?" the reporter asked Patrolman Brady.

They stood in the shadows of the green lights at the door.

"The bankers' trials were just a pink tea," declared Fowler. "What's next, Professor?"

Brady grinned.

"The slot-machine racket. It is one of the best-paying in the city. The Shapiro brothers run it. Moe Ruby is their agent in this precinct. He runs a joint that is a hang-out for every kid in the district. It's no use pulling the machines, because a crooked judge gave them an order restraining us on the grounds they are legal devices for the sale of mints."

His grin became broader.

"We'll just drop in there, and ask a few pointed questions. Moe is so sure of himself that he will crack wise. A cop shouldn't have to take that from any cheap rat. There will be a little shindig, and I wouldn't be surprised if some of the machines got busted."

He studied the reporter's face.

"Want to watch it?"

Fowler grinned his crooked little grin.

"At the very least, I should watch it."

TWENTY minutes later they took stock outside of Moe Ruby's place. The establishment they had just quitted was in ruins. Parts of five slot-machines were scattered over the floor. Turmoil had been replaced by silence, a silence unbroken by any protest from Moe.

"He should come to, in about an hour," said Brady, who rubbed three skinned knuckles.

Fowler touched a raw spot under one eye.

"You do give the nicest parties, Mr. Brady. You must come and see me sometime. Have you anything else in mind?"

"Yes," said Brady. "The push-cart racket." The light of battle gleamed in his blue eyes.

HE led the way to a street almost filled with pushcarts bearing flaming kerosene lamps. The pushcarts were presided over by swarthy men who loudly cried their wares. The men in the better positions were defiant and insolent. The men with the carts in the shadows were cringing and fearful. Leaning against a convenient lamp-post was a scowling youth, who seemed to be superintending the scene.

"It is one of the oldest rackets, and one of the most contemptible ones," the patrolman explained. "They pay that rat five dollars for the best positions. If they can't pay, they go back in the shadows. And if they should make some sales there, the money is taken away from them; but do you think they would squawk? No, they want to live."

There was action. With the night-stick of the patrolman pointing the way, the men in the favored positions moved their carts into the shadows. The men in the shadows moved to the favored positions. The youth by the lamp-post ran forward in loud protest. He shouted a stream of profanity that included the name of "Cassidy." The protest ended abruptly as the youth found a resting-place on the street between two carts.

Patrolman Brady rubbed his hands together.

"A good workmanlike job," was his verdict. He turned to the pushcart merchants. "If devil a cart is moved when I make my next round, there'll be some broken heads!" he threatened.

He and the reporter walked slowly away.

"That's just a start," the patrolman admitted. "You could go on for weeks and months. They all are things that make every honest cop grind his teeth. He knows that the men higher up are in on them, and that he has to wink at them, just waiting until he gets in the way and gets a bullet in the back from some rat he could have run out months

"You aren't going to the sticks, Tom; but the head of the new Racket Squad doesn't walk a beat, so how is he going to help a poor girl find her way around the big city?"

ago. I started out tonight happy. It was a good show, and you are a swell guy to play it with, Fowler. But it has me licked again. It is too big. It's—"

He broke off abruptly, dragging Fowler into the shelter of a doorway. The huge body of the patrolman was rigid. His voice was a low growl.

"See that car?"

He pointed to a car parked a short distance ahead of them. Four men were seated in it.

"They belong to Little Joe Pivak's mob. They have been trying to muscle in here for a month, but the word went out that Cassidy would play along with Smaltz. They're here for no good."

Peering out from the doorway, he studied the car and the street. He was thinking aloud.

"That's the Pastime Social Club up there a bit. It aint a stick-up, that's sure; they aint playing it that way."

The door of the club opened. The pool of light revealed the features of a young man who stepped out.

"Sonny Cassidy!" growled the patrolman. "Honest Mike Cassidy's boy! Sure, and it's as plain as the nose on my face. It's a snatch job they're planning to pull." His usually forgotten brogue became broader in his excitement. "Sure, and the snakes Mike Cassidy has been feeding has grown so fat and sassy they is planning to take a nip at their keeper himself."

The reporter stood at the patrolman's shoulder, watching the youth, unaware of danger, approaching the parked car.

"Shall I go for help?" Fowler asked.

The policeman laughed. It was the laugh of a fighting-man in action.

"Help?" His brogue added scorn to the word. "Sure, and when one good cop needs help against four of Little Joe Pivak's mob, we better turn over the city to them entirely!" He grinned. "Stick around. Stick around, and help pick up the pieces."

NOW Sonny Cassidy was near the radiator of the parked car. Two men stepped out. A bag slid over the head of the youth. Strong hands pinioned his arms and covered his mouth. He struggled gamely, but he was drawn quickly and inevitably toward the open rear door of the car.

Then Patrolman Tom Brady charged forward, his gun in his right hand. In the left he held the revolver taken from the arrested gangster's bodyguard. Both guns were blazing.

The bullets raked the rear of the car, riddling the gas-tank and the tire of the rear wheel near the curb. The two gangsters in the street dropped their victim on the running-board and returned the fire. One gangster fell. The other staggered, caught at the car for support, and then slipped to the sidewalk.

From the rear window of the car, the short, ugly muzzle of a sub-machine gun was extended. There was a sound that resembled the noise made by a stick drawn along the pickets of a wooden fence.

Brady stopped short, staggered, and then ran on.

The driver started the car, realized he had a flat tire, and jumped to the street. He darted toward safety. Fowler, unarmed, ran after him. A bullet whistled in the direction of the reporter.

Brady had come to grips with the man with the machine-gun.

Then, from around the corner, came help. The patrolman from the neighboring beat, attracted by the gun-play, came charging in, and he came shooting.

His first shot dropped the fleeing driver. Previous experience had taught Fowler that at a time like this no questions were asked; he must act quickly.

"Press!" he cried. "Brady's in the car!"

He saw the muzzle of the policeman's revolver, which had been trained upon him, flash upward. The man in blue gave no sign that he heard and understood, but he held his fire and ran toward the parked automobile, Fowler at his side.

From that time on, it was a scene of wild confusion. There were whistles, sirens and gongs. There were crowds, which surged through every barrier and made the work more difficult. . . .

The white-clad interne braced himself against the swaying of the ambulance as he bent over Patrolman Brady. It was a short run. He decided the dressing could wait. He stood up.

"Is he dead?" asked Fowler.

The interne grinned.

"Dead? If I took him to the morgue, I would lose my job."

The ambulance slowed down as massive iron gates swung open. Fowler stepped to the tail-board.

"So long," he told the interne. "Got to get a girl."

ON the following morning three men sat in an office in City Hall. There was His Honor the Mayor, usually debonair, but today worn and disheveled. There was the Police Commissioner, the same official who yesterday had signed an order sending Patrolman Brady to the sticks, but whose eyes today sparkled with courage and new faith. And there was Honest Mike Cassidy, whose fat, moist hands played nervously over the arms of the massive oak chair in which he was sitting.

Outside the office, waiting for a statement, was a crowd of reporters and photographers, and at their head was Fowler.

Cassidy broke the silence inside the office.

"I can't get over it that they would try to kidnap Sonny! Why, they—"

THEN the Commissioner swung into action. Years had dropped from his shoulders. He was back to the days when he walked a beat and fought his way to a captaincy by merit. Forgotten were the years during which he had adopted politics as a conveyor to bridge the gulf from a uniform to a well-tailored suit and an ornate office.

"It happened, didn't it?" he demanded. "I am not blaming you alone, Cassidy. We all shut our eyes. We helped build up something that has become so powerful we no longer can control it under the old methods. You know politics, Cassidy. I know police-work. We need that work to save ourselves. We are going to get it. Politics isn't going to interfere." He nodded toward the group behind the closed door. "Does that go, Cassidy?"

Honest Mike nodded.

It was the Mayor who brought up the problem.

"That is all very well as a start, gentlemen. But we forget that we are in a tough spot. Another dose of publicity like we had this morning will ruin us. Election is a short distance off, and there is talk of a reform candidate. What are we going to tell those reporters?"

"It's that damn' Fowler," Honest Mike lamented. "Shut him up, and the rest would be easy."

"What does he want for himself?" demanded the Mayor.

Honest Mike sighed.

"That's just it—he don't want nothing! I sort of felt him out this morning, asking him if he would like a job here at the City Hall, acting as your secretary, like. I told him the hours would be easy, and the pay right. But—he turns me down, cold."

The Commissioner leaned forward.

"I know what he wants, and what the great majority of people want. They want the work Brady started yesterday to be continued. They will get that from us, or they will get it from some other officials they elect. They won't stand for anything less.

"We are going to promise it to them through those reporters. I ordered Brady to the sticks. Well, he isn't going there. He stays right here as the head of a squad working directly under me, and they will keep up the work he started. We tell the reporters that too."

Honest Mike beamed his approval.

"That's the out, all right. It will carry us through election. After that, we can ease down a bit."

The glance the Commissioner flashed at him contained contempt and pity.

"You can't see it, Cassidy, but you and your kind are through. You are as passé as a hoop-skirt would be in a night-club revue. You have been on the skids for a long while. Prohibition finally ended you, for its passing took from you the last tolerance the public had. Now no party can afford to have you and your methods. You are an issue that is bigger than party lines."

He turned to the Mayor.

"Let's face the facts. The old days are gone; they went out with wild bull-markets, holding companies and million-dollar bonuses. And I, speaking as one who profited from them, say please God, let them be gone forever!

"Now, we are faced with two alternatives. By doing an about-face, and doing it sincerely and steadfastly, we can retain the honest rewards that go with the administration of government. They seem pitifully small by comparison with the past, but we can take them—or nothing."

He studied the faces of the others.

"You gentlemen can make your own choice. I prefer a little—a decent little—to nothing."

The Mayor stood up. He extended his hand.

"I am with you, Commissioner." He turned to Cassidy, whose face was ashen. "Are you going to play our way, Mike, or shall we go it alone?"

HONEST MIKE stared his disbelief. He walked slowly toward a side door and stepped through it, leaving the Mayor and the Commissioner to face the reporters. The closing of the door eloquently announced his decision. Honest Mike Cassidy belonged to the old era. He knew no other. He would die with it. . . .

Late that afternoon, Rose McNeil sat beside a bed in a little white room within the little city where a big city sends its halt, lamed, and blind, those sick in mind and body. Patrolman Thomas Brady, the occupant of the bed, stirred and opened his eyes. He smiled when he saw the girl.

"Pardon me, Officer—"

"Yes, miss."

"I am a stranger in this section of the city. Perhaps you can direct me to this address."

She held a newspaper with glaring headlines before his eyes. He saw the words: *"Patrolman Brady Wins Commendation—"* and looked up to meet her proud and tender smile.

The bandages made it difficult, but he managed to hold her tightly within the curve of one arm. After some time, she released herself with a little sigh.

"It never can happen quite that way again, Tom."

Realization brought a look of sadness to his face. She went on quickly:

"Not that, Tom. You aren't going to the sticks. But the head of the new Racket Squad doesn't walk a beat. So how is he going to help a poor girl find her way around the big city?"

BEFORE he could reply, the white-clad nurse coughed and entered.

"There was a queer sort of man here to see you, Mr. Brady," she began. "He asked how you were, and I told him you would be out of here in a week. He asked about Miss McNeil, so I told him he could see you both if he wanted to. Well, he just stood there and looked me over from head to foot, but I don't think he even saw me. Then he smiled, a sort of crooked smile, and said he wanted me to take you both a message. He said it was sort of goofy message, but that you both would understand it. . . . Anyway, he said to tell you that yesterday gave him back something that the city had taken from him years ago. He said that what he got back almost made up for something he knew he never could have. And he said not to feel sorry for him because he wouldn't want it any other way."

She waited for a reply, but the two were oblivious of her.

Their hands were clasped. They were looking out the window toward the river, where red, green and white lights were beginning to twinkle. From the west came the multitudinous noises which made up the roar of the city. The captain of a passing steamer tooted his whistle.

She flounced impatiently out of the room, leaving them alone together.

Beelzebub

One of America's ablest authors here presents a novel you will never forget—the thrilling drama of the greatest structure ever raised by men.

By R. G. KIRK

THE tall stacks smoke. Row upon row, strung out along the tranquil Susquehanna, the tall stacks wave dark banners—and everyone in Ironville wears a smile. Three times each day ten thousand step it off toward the smoking chimneys, swinging their heavy dinner-pails; and grinning, bellow genial insults at the other turn, just coming off. They pass by, swinging light dinner-pails, that other turn, extremely light ones, striding for home and pipe and slippers, and the call to come and get it. They do not stand on street-corners now, these thousands, listening while windbags spout. Men are too busy. Men are at work again.

But the man who put these thousands back to work no longer looks with satisfaction down upon their comings and their goings from his office window. B. L. Sebold has punched out his last time-card. He has gone. He has left the world and its steel-mills and the battles that he loved.

Never the faintest trace of him since that tragic day when he got his last proper knock-out with monoxide gas. And he was *the* B. L. Sebold, keep in mind: a giant figure. . . . The tall stacks smoke again. But B. L. Sebold, he who really made them smoke, is gone. Not rightly dead, remember—only gone. Sebold just isn't. One day he was the general manager of Susquehanna Steel, and the biggest, toughest captain of the world's biggest, most spectacular industry; and the next day he was not even an obituary. He had faded as absolutely and untraceably into the void as a wisp of steam above one of his boiler-houses.

Most people thought—foul play. But there was no foul play. Last week, in Ironville, I found out what became of Sebold. Old Vrag told me—Old Vrag, who is Blast Furnace No. 4 at Susquehanna Steel. Everyone knows about the Krvav bridge—the mightiest structure ever raised by men: steel's mightiest labor. Set in stupendous scenery, which it does not mar, it leaps the terrible chasm of Krvav, deep in the heart of the Balkan. There, where that unbelievable steel lacework soars, a monument to peace and to its builder—there is B. L. Sebold. . . .

Up to last week I hadn't been in Ironville for years. Last time I was in Ironville I got the steel-works blues. I swore I'd never visit the old stamping-ground again, unless good men by tens of thousands were sweating in it as of old. For the tall stacks stood forlorn, unplumed. The furnaces were positively Arctic. It made your skin creep just to look at them. The old boys in the offices sat about with their teeth in their mouth, and faces longer than a stopper-rod. But out on the plant you got a chill for sure. There were no men about—well, scarcely any. And there weren't any bohunks any more. That's the thing that made me weep. Old Mike Slavonik at the hot-pot house; Yanko Melosovitch at the pigger; Djordje Oslanski with his big track gangs—gone. Damn the depression. There were men, I mean. They worked. They ate up work. Good people. No names like theirs disgraced America in the years of crime. They helped to build America. And now they weren't there, to roar out hearty greeting: "Ho dah, Meest'r! Too much long time I no see! *Yak si mash,* Meest'r? Come my house tonight. Eat plenty pig meat. Drink plenty beer. Drink too much viska, mebbe! Sing like hell all night, no sleep not'ing! You come sure t'ing, yes—no?"

But last week, back in Ironville, everything was Jacob. The rolling-mills were rolling; the open hearths were melting, the forge-shop squeezing, thumping, the foundries casting. And best of all, Big Dan, Dan Tankovitch, old six feet four,

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

with killer eyes, and handlebar mustache, and kindly mouth, was back again, blast-furnacing.

We sat beneath the bustle-pipe, Big Dan and I, and talked and talked. The bustle-pipe was Old Vrag's bustle-pipe, which he wears about his bulging iron belly like a hunky's money-belt. Only this belt is bigger even than a hunky's money-belt—believe it or not. It's five feet thick, and a hundred and fifty feet around, and made of three-eighths plate and fire-brick instead of silver-studded leather. A fire-gutted monster, that Stari Vrag. *Stari* means *old,* and *Vrag* means the *Devil.* Old Nick—so Slavic furnace hands had christened this hulking, sulphurous goblin at Susky Steel, whose

There Sebold saw, for the first time, the tall bride of Jimmy Doan.

more prosaic name, in English, was Blast Furnace No. 4.

We sat in the shadow of Old Vrag's bustle-pipe, and we fanned and fanned of the old days and the old friends, Dan and I. And a heat got tapped under Dan's expert superintendence, and ran, a blazing, vicious little river, whispering dreadful things, till it reached the runner's end, when it cascaded, with a hellish gurgle, into the waiting hot-pots. Flakes of glistening graphite floated in the air and settled on our clothes; and a skin-drying heat, familiar as though I had felt it only yesterday, made red our faces in the cast-house gloom. And twice the cinder notch poured out its thick, infernal treacle into the cinder ladles; and still we talked.

And then, all of a sudden, it came upon me there. Conviction! Under the eerie influence which the monster blast-stacks never fail to fling about me, I felt a certainty that I was talking to the man of all men who should know the unsolved grisly riddle of B. L. Sebold's utter snuffing-out.

Dan Tankovitch was a blast-furnace man from hat to shoes—a foreman now. Dan had done other jobs in steel; but always Dan had come back to the stacks. Once a blast-furnacer, always a blast-furnacer. You may get away from your job; but it will always be the biggest job you ever had in all your life. It was so with big Dan Tankovitch. It had been so, likewise, with B. L. Sebold. However high he rose in steel, however many mighty processes of steel kept gathering to the guidance of his capable great brain, still the huge stacks were the great absorbing study of his life.

I thought of this, and saw then, in a flash, how the huge stacks could be a bond between these two—Sebold, and Tankovitch Danilo. They were blast-furnace masters, these two. Big men. Theirs was the biggest craft of all the crafts. Blast-furnace men make pig. Steel is pig-iron with a college education. Civilization trudges on with steel. And upon the know-how of blast-furnace men depends the forward march of mankind.

And they had know-how when it came to pig, that pair. So there had grown between them mutual respect such as but few men ever feel for one another—a mutual respect of which I had been very much aware at Susquehanna Steel. Many an hour B. L. Sebold had spent beneath this very bustle-pipe where Dan and I now sat; many an hour with Dan, discussing furnace practice—even furnace theory, for big Dan Tankovitch had brains. I had often wondered if there did not live between those two that rare and beautiful thing upon which men may confidently call for strength and help and understanding in a dire hour. These two big men were not, perhaps, so far apart in station as appeared to most observers. In his own country, I had felt sure, always, this Tankovitch Danilo had been some one. These two big men might have been friends. If that were so, then with Dan Tankovitch might lie the clearing of the grim mystery of B. L. Sebold's absolute erasure.

SO, in the old mill idiom, abruptly, I approached that ghostly business.

"Dan," I said, "tell me: Which place gone *veliki* boss—the big boss—Sebold?"

But Dan was not caught unaware. As though he had been ready for my question, a very wise grave smile came into Dan's pale eyes; a smile that spoke appreciation, I felt sure, that I alone, and so long out of steel, had sensed the bond that lived between this giant Montenegrin and the *veliki* boss—and that I realized what it might lead to in a dreadful hour.

But Dan, still smiling gravely, answered: "Not me, Mister. Not Tankovitch Danilo. He's no be fellow tell vitch ples gone *veliki* boss. Better you ask dot Noomer Four—dot Stari Vrag. Dot old bles farnes, he's be best fellow for tell'n' you dot t'ing."

So I asked No. 4 Blast Furnace at Susquehanna Steel. So I asked Noomer Four, whose better name was Satan. And though I never was a blast-furnace man, except that I helped build them; and though, which made it still more difficult, No. 4 bore properly the title Stari Vrag, and properly spoke only Slavic, still we conversed, we two. We had a fine interpreter between us—the best the world afforded: Dan Tankovitch. Dan knew blast-furnace language. So, through Dan, that fire-boweled old goblin Stari Vrag told me what I shall here put down about the end of B. L. Sebold.

HE lived a man's life, B. L. Sebold did, as many an old steel hand can attest. Well, he died a man's death too; I can tell the old steel gang that. More than a mere man's death, I often feel. When I think of what Old Vrag told me, one word stands in my mind—*Götterdämmerung*, where the stout old fighting heathen gods went down in flame and smoke.

Foul play. That's what those thought who best knew B. L. Sebold. In a steel plant a man's body might be made to vanish utterly and forever, flesh and bones. And who loved B. L. Sebold? He got work out of everyone with just sheer brute power to make the tonnage. Drive and brains. That was Sebold's prescription. Give orders—smart ones. Then see that they got carried out—or that the man to whom you gave them did. Sentiment? Bah! With sufficient drive and brains there was no need to have men liking you.

He used to wear across his vest a steel watch-chain. Utterly characteristic—bright steel, where other men wore gold or platinum. Steel, the most precious metal, certainly. Nobody ever did a tap for B. L. Sebold because they loved him. But love him or not, you couldn't help being loyal to him. He outworked everybody. Many's the man he loaded past his strength, and drove beyond the mental elastic limit; but he drove himself harder than he drove any other man.

Beelzebub! That nickname tells the story. Of course it was inevitable. *B. L. Sebold—B. L. Zebub—Beelzebub.* But it wasn't only the resemblance in the sound that gave it to him. Sebold earned it. A steel plant can be hell, all right. And what a prince of devils B. L. Sebold was! Oh, I could name you fifty men right off the reel who, one time or another, would joyfully have shoved him off the tapping floor into a ladle of liquid pig—forty-nine others and me.

BUT there was no foul play. I have that from Old Vrag, who knows—who, very dreadfully, is sure. . . .

About five years before that eerie vanishment of Sebold which left him neither with the living nor the dead, there came to Susquehanna Steel, fresh from Sebold's own alma mater Valley Tech, as tightly jointed, stoutly made and bravely hearted a young bucko as any man might wish to lay an eye upon. His name was Jimmy Doan—James Bledsoe Doan to you; and he had tacked onto his name the overpowering degree of Metallurgical Engineer. Entirely unabashed by this terrific handicap, straight from the pleasant sloping lawns of Old South Mountain came this diploma-toter, looking for trouble in the very place where he would be most apt to find it—Susquehanna Steel. And presently he was standing before Beelzebub himself, with only the width of a desk between him and that icy-eyed man-wrecker.

Sebold, with an avid eye, looked this hard-knit young trouble-seeker up and down. And finally, "Can you," inquired B. L. Sebold, "take it?"

"Abuse," the young buck stated, "is the one thing I am fondest of. Can you," he wanted to know of Sebold, "dish it out?"

At their first contact those two men struck fire. Jimmy Doan was not given much to talking with his mouth. Jimmy Doan was not much of a smart-cracker. Snappy come-backs were not Jimmy Doan's specialty. Jimmy Doan specialized in breaking harness-straps. But Sebold rubbed him wrong. Small wonder. Never were there two more different men. Jimmy Doan loved men. The name, James Bledsoe Doan, could have been written right beside Abou ben Adhem's in the angel's golden book. Jimmy had heard a lot, of course, about this hard-boiled *hombre*. At Valley Tech the man was legend: her biggest graduate—Fee-fi-fo-fum himself. He smelled the blood of young diploma-toters; he ground their bones to make him dolomite for open-hearth bottoms. At first sight, instinctively, Jimmy Doan hated this merciless man-breaker. Instinctively Doan saw ahead of him grinding days in which Sebold would feed the strength of him, the youth, the fire, the bounce of him, to steel. And grimly, guessing the fearful odds against him, Jimmy Doan threw down the challenge. Could Sebold dish it out? A crust, that question took!

B. L. Sebold gazed at this belligerent young man bleakly. He was asking for it, eh?

"How much do you think you are worth to me?" asked Sebold.

Jimmy Doan told him how much he was worth.

"You will get what you receive," said Sebold. "But if you're here a year from now, I'll double the figure you named. Report to Steve Takacs, over at the open hearth."

"Thank you too much," said Jimmy Doan; he left Sebold, and went directly over to the open hearth to find Steve Takacs.

Steve was a fire-eating Magyar, a straw boss who had charge of the bottom-makers, a man who knew his job of making bottom like nobody else's business; and who delighted in the side-line of singeing the trousers off of little college boys whom B. L. Sebold sent to him for that particular purpose. Steve Takacs had run more young diploma-toters out of Susky Steel, with their breeches seats asmolder, than you could mark up on the side of a charging-box. But he didn't run Jimmy Doan out of Susquehanna Steel. A dolomite scoop was pie for Jimmy Doan, and tossing the stuff through a blazing furnace door was duck soup. He ate the soot, the dust, the fumes, the heat, and licked his chops for more—and in six months was labor foreman at the open hearth, and boss of Steve Takacs; and what was very fine, Steve Takacs liked it. Steve swore by Jimmy Doan; and when you've made a friend of a Hungarian, a real Magyar, you have made a friend.

JIMMY DOAN could get work out of men; but he did it by methods diametrically opposite to those of B. L. Sebold. Jimmy Doan never used the rawhide. Men turned work out for Jimmy Doan because they liked him. He never drove. Men who needed driving, Jimmy Doan fired out on the backs of their necks.

Beelzebub bore down on Jimmy Doan, rejoicing in this fine young strength which now was his to feed to steel. But Jimmy Doan had loyal men behind him, and they held him up. One year in steel, one year away from the classic halls that passed you out a sheepskin which said you were a Metallurgical Engineer, and Jimmy Doan was no longer labor foreman at the open hearth, but Master Mechanic. He was master mechanic of a half-mile-long row of hundred-and-fifty-ton soup-bowls, squirting fire at every crack, and he had a load on his young backbone to make the vertebræ of an old-timer squeak. But with the help of loyal men there came no cracking of the spine of Jimmy Doan. And presently there came along another help for Jimmy in carrying the loads that B. L. Sebold hung around his neck. There came a girl by name of Helen Petrovitch to Ironville, Pennsylvania.

HELEN nearly tied up traffic when she crossed the Pike. For what it took to tie up traffic, Helen Petrovitch had. She was strongly formed, as Montenegrin women often are. She had been made for the mothering of men —men of a race of mountain warriors who often grew to six feet six in height. And yet because the girl was flat, not thick, there was no hint of grossness to her contours. You did not think of her as wide-hipped, though she was. You noticed rather her broad shoulders and her fine straight back.

Above her lovely, eye-arresting waistline, her chest was high, making her seem full-bosomed, which she was not. There girlishness remained, entrancing promise. The man who won her would possess many women as she changed with seasonings of love and motherhood to maturity. And as she walked, her hale body swung along with that litheness and consciousness of splendid carriage that only mountain people have.

Her face was very broad just underneath the wide-apart, warm gray eyes, and it pointed suddenly from there to the chin. There was not the slightest hint of that smooth perfect oval which makes Madonnas of the girls of Italy, just across the Adriatic from this Petrovitch girl's native highland. But, very arresting in the quickly narrowing lean face, her scarlet mouth was generously big, and—typically Slavic trait—the color widened on the lips immediately at the corners of it, giving lusciousness of a heavy mouth, without a heavy mouth's lack of strength. A sensuous, not a sensual mouth. A mouth at the same time passionate and strong.

She wore her magnificent dusky hair tightly twisted, as peasant Slav girls do, and closely pinned to an almost painful smoothness. But this did not make the Petrovitch girl look plain. Instead it showed a shapely head, and brought out startlingly the flawless, good-boned contours of her face, the amazing texture of her skin, the smooth fairness of her brow, the unbelievably delicate transparent convolutions of her ears, the rare combination of beauty and steadiness in the wide cheek-bones. Men looked at that severe, tight-pinned coiffure and thought of something which no longer makes men catch their breath, as in past days. They thought of taking it down, and feeling strands of it, thick, warm, alive, deep down between their fingers.

She was a man's eyeful of woman, this Petrovitch girl, the whole of her, from head to feet; but men at first stared only at her hair. No wonder. Light coruscated off it in the day with hints of glinting purple, like sunlight glinting on a grackle's wing. And at night that hair gave back the night sky's dark unfathomable blue.

Jimmy Doan looked first at Helen Petrovitch's hair. And this, my fellow-men, is praise. For Jimmy was devoted to the study of ankles. And here was a pair come down through centuries from a race of mountaineers. Attached to them were feet that had been built to beauty on the dizzy trails of Tsrnagora, with arches which would let water flow beneath them, and curves at instep fit to knock your eye out. Past generations in a land straight up and down, in a land where the broadest highways were but goat-paths, had bequeathed to Helen Petrovitch ankles pared down to exquisite spareness, slender and long. But just the same, young Jimmy Doan looked, as did all other males, young, middle-aged and senile, first at her hair. And he got a wallop over the heart from which he hasn't recovered, to this day.

WHEN Jimmy Doan first saw Helen Petrovitch, she was walking down the famous Pike in Ironville, Pennsylvania. She had on no hat. She was a wise young woman who knew what she had. She was walking with big Dan Tankovitch—which was also wise; for a girl like that, walking the famous old Pike un-

escorted, would have courted many perils, the least of which would have been arrest for causing traffic jams and inciting riot. But she was with Big Dan. And the Lady Godiva could have ridden down the Pike, in Ironville, with Tankovitch Danilo as her squire, and got through it unmolested. Dan Tankovitch was six feet four, and he had the cold gray Montenegrin eye—no warming flecks of gold in it as in the eyes of Helen Petrovitch.

THE Pike at Ironville is one tough main stem. It parallels the boundary line of Susquehanna Steel. To west of it, belching black smoke once more, the forest of tall stacks tower, arising from the flat land that stretches to the Susquehanna. To the east the town of Ironville arises steeply, crowned at one end with the residences of the superintendents, and at the other with the shouldering homes of Bohunkville; in between these two communities lies a section where the American mill-hands live, together with many foreign men who graduated out of Bohunkville, to send through high school and, in many instances, to college, fine boys and girls.

Out of one of the clean small homes of the Bohunkville graduates had come Mr. Tankovitch Danilo, for an evening stroll, with, at his side, his beautiful goddaughter, newly arrived in Ironville. Dan headed with her to the Pike, to show the girl the sights, to show her that she was not exactly a stranger in a strange land. Walking along the Pike the girl would see South Slavic people, scores of them. In one block they might be going reverently into a little mosquelike Orthodox church—and in the next block others might come staggering blindly out of Pete's newly opened rum-hole. The old Pike lived again. Now that the stacks were pouring smoke, the call was out for old-time mill hands; and hundreds of them who had disappeared in favor of the younger, English-speaking second generation, came out from behind their long-stemmed silver-lidded pipes, gave up their forced retirement, and smiling gladly, dug out from the cobwebs of the cellar, the battered dinner-bucket.

Dan loved the Pike. Strolling along it, Dan might pause and look into the steamship agent's window, and there see beautiful passenger liners coasting the Adriatic shore, under the towering battlements of the Karst, upon whose highest summits perched Dan's native land. The Pike was polyglot once more. Magyar and Hrvat, Bulgar and Serb, Wend and Wallachian, Dan could see; worker and leech, dope-peddler, shyster, priest. Also Maria Dobra and Katrina Kurva. Ask any steel-mill man who those two Slavic ladies are. They are well known in any steel-mill town. Maria you may see upon the Pike most any time, full-skirted, head-kerchiefed, modestly going about the business of her household, shopping, marketing, balancing some one's laundry on her head. But Katrina you see only when the stacks are smoking and the pay-envelopes are thick. Maria Dobra and Katrina Kurva—well-known girls. *Dobra* means good. *Kurva* is the Slavic word for *harlot*.

One tough main stem, the Pike at Ironville. Yet there walked along it, all unaccosted, a girl of stunning figure; for Tankovitch Danilo walked with her—walked with her in a town where women very often walked behind their men.

But if the devil himself had been walking with her down that sulphurous Pike which proverb says is paved with good intentions, Jimmy Doan would have said to Helen Petrovitch what he had to say, the first minute he laid eyes on her.

Jimmy was just then coming off the plant. Jimmy was, at that moment, a fairly tough-looking bum. Jimmy, coming out through the watchman's gate, had just rung up on the time-clock a twenty-hour wrestling-bout with the tilting mechanism underneath a hundred-and-fifty-ton open-hearth furnace; and to look at Jimmy, you would have surmised, correctly, that the open-hearth furnace had been on top for the most part of the match.

But it isn't who's on top for the most part of the match, but who's on top at the end of it that counts; and at the close of the twentieth hour, Jimmy had hooked a flying mare onto old fire-belly, and had slapped him on his tail, and made him holler "Uncle!"—which is no mean shakes of a performance for a master mechanic who is little more than one year out of college.

JIM, at the bout's conclusion, had not stopped to wash up on the plant; as sooty as a mill roof-truss, greasy as a gear-box, he had taken it on the lam for home, where he could clean up right. A temporary wash-up on the plant, in order to escape arrest for taking home two pounds of Company gear-grease in his hair, would be just a waste of time;

"She say tell you," said Dan, interpreting, "dot any voman, any place in vorld, understand dot kind of talk you make!"

and there wasn't any time to waste. Jimmy Doan had a bohunk wedding on that night. Mr. Imbro Zelenjak, as fine a keg-head as ever played a tune on a hunky banjo, or dolomite scoop, had sent money and a ship ticket to *stara* country for a bride.

There would be plenty *pivo* at the Sokol Hall on this night, Imbro's wedding night; plenty beer, and pretzels, and sugary Croatian shortcakes, and national costumes, dazzling white, and rainbow-hued, and marvelously embroidered; and dancing that would shake the stout floor beams of Sokol Hall. There would be fat and shining-faced South Slavic wives to waltz with—wives who broadly smiled once more, now that their old men were out from underfoot, now that a woman could move about in her kitchen again until the men came home, dead tired and content, and beautifully besmeared with mill grime. Jimmy Doan would waltz with them. They were the women of his men—men whom he loved, stout, honest, simple fellows. And there would be the strapping, straight-backed South Slav girls, second generation in America, most of them, but looking like newly landed "greeners" in their old lovely *stara* country peasant dresses. It would require no obligations of friendship with his men to make Jim dance with these young Slav-American Amazons.

There would be also Imbro's bride to dance with. Jim had seen her. Jim had looked her over. Fresh from old Carniola. Not a word of English. Milk-skinned, white-toothed, scarlet-mouthed, wide-eyed and demure. Built like Ceres —Soforonia Matosovitch. Cost you a dollar every time you danced with the bride. Dollar a dance to dance with Ceres. Very reasonable. Dollars to help set up Imbro and his luscious Balkan peach in housekeeping. Some armful, that clean, sturdy, sweet-eyed peasant.

SO Jimmy was dashing home, intent on cleaning up in one grand rush, so as to get to the fun of Imbro's wedding celebration on time; and with the fixed intention of dancing often enough with Imbro's bride to finance the cook-stove, or perhaps the bed. But he never made it. If they were depending on Jimmy Doan's dance-money, Imbro and Soforonia would have to do without the cook-stove, or perhaps the bed. For just outside the steel works gate, Jimmy Doan saw Helen Petrovitch and Dan.

Better to say, perhaps, that he saw Helen Petrovitch. He did see Dan, of course; but out of focus—you know, the way you see the right fielder when your

eye is on the pitcher. Jimmy Doan saw Helen Petrovitch's unbelievable hair. The sun had gone down late that August evening, beyond the smoking stacks, beyond the ruddy Susquehanna, behind the peaceful York hills on the farther shore. The heaven still was moonless. Only the early stars shone through the indigo of the summer evening sky, down on the hair of Helen Petrovitch.

Jimmy Doan had never seen a thing as beautiful as Helen Petrovitch—so femininely strong a thing. She looked as though those curved feet of hers had stood bared to the rich warm earth for many and many an hour, so that a primal vigor, a lusty haleness and fertility, had been drawn up into her.

JIMMY walked straight up to her and Dan, and looked into her gray eyes. Jimmy had never before seen gray eyes flecked with gold. Jimmy looked into these so deeply that the snowy skin on the wide cheek-bones just below them, bloomed roses. But the long coal-black lashes did not drop. The tall broad-shouldered girl looked back, deeply also, into Jimmy's eyes; and what she saw there set her wholesome heart to hammering beneath her lovely breast.

Jimmy Doan said to her:

"I always knew it would be at first sight with me. And I knew that you'd be beautiful—but not this beautiful. I'm Jimmy Doan. Dan knows me. What is your name?"

"Jelka," the girl said.

"Yelka," repeated Jimmy, the word so soft, so warm, possessive on his tongue, that the girl's cheek bloomed again.

Soot on Jimmy's nose, black grease in his hair, soiled and besmeared from his battle down in the gassy gloom beneath the open-hearth furnace. Tell him he looked like some wide-backed nether-world god, besmudged by fires of the pit, and he'd tell you to go take a jump t'hell off the dock for yourself. But let a woman's eyes tell him that! Let *the* woman's! Ah!

"Jelka Petrovitch," said the girl.

"Yelka Petrovitch," said Jimmy. "But listen, Yelka Petrovitch: If you speak English, I've been cheated, and I'll have to enter a complaint about it. But maybe you don't. Maybe you only understand it just a little."

The splendid girl turned to Dan Tankovitch a pair of twinkling eyes, and spoke to him in Slavic. Then she looked back at Jimmy with a devastating smile.

Dan grinned and spoke to Jimmy.

"She say tell you," said Dan, interpreting, "dot any voman, any place in vorld, understand dot kind of talk you make!"

Thus Jimmy Doan fell in love; and he made a first-class, thorough, everlasting job of it; fell in love madly, uncalculatingly, head over heels, as a man is likely to do who falls in love at first sight in the heyday of his youth and lusty vigor. . . .

Much differently did B. L. Sebold fall in love. B. L. Sebold did not really "fall in love." Something precipitate is suggested in the phrase, something turbulent, headlong. Love came to B. L. Sebold at the very apex of his manhood. He was but ten years older, more or less, than Jimmy Doan. But those ten years, in steel, had drained much of the turbulence out of him. Love came to Sebold as a tremendous, orderly conviction, swift but not instant, stirring him to the very foundations of his being when it did, at last, arrive.

Sebold had never married; had boasted that he never would, as hard-mouthed, icy-eyed, ruthless fighting-men have done before. The love of battle comes first, claims that sort; the love of woman second. Love is feminine; love is soft. Love comes first with women. With warriors, mighty workers, life's high rapture is the fight, the pitting of great strength against great odds. To B. L. Sebold, steel was battle. To B. L. Sebold, steel came first; other things after, not excluding love. What time, what strength, what loyalty did the terrific battle, steel, leave him for love?

And then Sebold met Jelena of Njgosh.

THE village of Njgosh, in the far-away Balkan, is the birthplace of a royal line that ruled for centuries the little hero country which its sons name Tsrna Gora — Black Mountain — Montenegro. Many have called that bare and rocky land the Eagle's Nest. Freedom dwelt in its crags for half a thousand years, protected there, against the most terrific odds a people ever faced, defended there by tribes of tall lean warriors, the like of which the world may never see again.

Out of this tiny village, Njgosh, there came to America one of the blood that had so long, so patriarchally ruled the destinies of Tsrnagora; a tall, lean-stomached, rangy highland tribesman, Mirko of Njgosh, fit representative of the ancient line of Montenegro's warrior chiefs.

With him came his sister Jelena; an amazing creature, a girl cast in heroic mold, but utterly feminine; a girl bewilderingly lovely, lithe as a mountain lioness, very proud, very gracious; unruly South Slav fire smoldering, deep down in her steady eyes, challenging men to fan it into flame.

"I HAVE come far to talk with you men," said the tall Mirko of Njgosh to B. L. Sebold and the other captains of industry who had been called to this conference. "Not, because you are powerful, but because I think you honest. One of my countrymen wrote to me that this is so. This countryman of mine knows when a man is honest. He has worked for Mr. Sebold during many years."

He spoke slowly, this tall light-eyed man; not because his English was not sure, but because he came of a race more apt with deeds than words. Such speak deliberately. And a group of the world's most powerful men sat quiet, waiting for what this grave big man had to say to them.

"I am here, therefore," Mirko of Njgosh stated, "to offer you the great ideal investment for your purpose—a billion-dollar loan to finance a new nation. That nation you might designate the U.S.B. It is the United States of the Balkan."

Swift interest swept every face.

"I shall sit down and smoke," said Mirko. "When a man stands, he is likely to make a speech. I only want to talk with you. Sitting and smoking, I shall feel at ease with you."

He lowered his tall form into a chair.

"As you are doubtless all aware," said Mirko, "there stretches from the Alps of Carniola in the west to the Euxine shore of Bulgaria on the east, a land where almost none but South Slav people dwell, some fifteen millions of them, brothers all. And yet these South Slav people have shed each other's blood until the Balkan soil is drenched with it. Hatreds stirred up by demagogues and grafters within, and by meddling European diplomats and power-crazy leaders without, turn Croat and Montenegrin against their brother Serb, and Serb against Bulgarian; meanwhile, crushed between, another honest little people stands and cries out to a Christian world the same cry that it made long centuries back: 'Come over into Macedonia, and help us!'

"Right now, as we are talking here," said Mirko, "a ghastly revolution would be turning our lovely land to shambles were the people not looking forward to the peaceful birth of their United States. Right now, today, as in past centuries, the Balkan, but for the hope of the U.S.B., is a tinder-box that will, as sure as history, set the world afire again. And the next world conflagration never will be put out. It will burn itself out when the world of men has perished."

Sebold and the other powerful men of this conference sat leaning forward in their chairs.

"So I am asking, first of all," said Mirko, "that capital invest its strength in the peace of the world. But listen further.

"In all that stretch of South Slav land, from the Julian Alps to the Black Sea, there is scarcely one family which has not had some member of it in America. And in America, under American institutions, nearly every South Slav emigrant has prospered. Many of them are now American citizens. Many of them returned to their old home land, bringing with them savings of ten years which could not have been accumulated in the country of their birth in ten generations. Thus it is that Slavs of the South do not blame on capital the woes of the world. They have known capital in America to do miracles of good for their own kin. Therefore I am asking capital to invest its strength in a new state which will not be communistic.

"NOW the United States of the Balkan, gentlemen," Mirko went on, "is ready to be born. I do not ask you to finance a revolution, nor for gambling money. I ask you to finance a new nation's healthy infant growth; I seek financing for a South Slavic Seven-year Plan. Instead of confiscation to finance it, we call on capital. With or without your aid, the United States of the Balkan will succeed. But with the promise of your help, the U.S.B. will come into being bloodlessly. Not a dinar will go for arms; every dinar will go for works of peace, for the advancement of a country potentially rich, which lack of peace and unity have kept standing still for centuries. That country has needed so many things so long, that with providing them, and with the fear of war abolished at the very seat of wars, the world will be at work again within a year, the evil, idle years forgotten.

"And so I offer you a land of untold mineral wealth, whose mountains hardly have been scratched—a beautiful fertile land, whose soil is loved by people made tough and sturdy through centuries of such hardships as you here cannot in the faintest way appreciate.

"Our Slavic brethren in the north are working out their new scheme for the welfare of the common man. With the help of capital, we South Slavs will so far outstride them in seven years that the eyes of the world will be turned away from them and their ideas to see what miracles honest capital, uninterested in munitions, can perform."

Mirko of Njgosh paused. Nobody spoke.

"That interests you?" asked Mirko.

NEXT day Mirko started back for Europe.

And two weeks from the day when Mirko of Njgosh talked with the Americans, three planes wrote in white smoke one word across the morning sky of Zagreb, Belgrade, Sofia.

"Sada," the planes wrote. *"Now!"*

And the bodyguard of the youthful king of Jugoslavia marched into the chamber of Belgrade, where he and his cabinet sat. Without a word his cabinet arose and walked away from him and stood in line beside the drawn-up bodyguard, leaving the boy alone behind his desk—alone but for old Yashko Kapetanovitch, the Minister of State, the oldest of them all. A veteran of more than half a stormy century of Balkan politics, he loved that orphan boy as though he were a son.

The youthful ruler walked to a high window and stood there a moment, looking up at the writing in the sky. Old Kapetanovitch strode over to his side and drew a revolver. But the boy pushed down his hand.

"Sada?" the young king said. "Well, then. What do we wait for? Come. Let us show the world once more that a Serb, and a Karageorgevitch, knows how to die."

"Die, Excellency?" exclaimed the leader of the cabinet. "But Excellency, your people, from the Black Sea to the Alps, wish you a hundred years! They also wish you, now, to read this document. It authorizes the acceptance of a loan of fifty billion dinars from the Americans to the United States of the Balkan. Your signature will place this sum at our disposal, Mr. President."

So the old days came back to Ironville again. Ahead were seven years of steel in which to build a new United States. Seven years for capital to square itself with a world that had been doubting more and more the brains, the probity, of capital, as idleness went on, sapping the character of nations. Seven years to show what capital could do for Southern Slavic people with a Seven-year Plan. Seven years, providing revolution, hovering, did not strike.

There was great need for haste, and the great burden of this haste, the desperate task imposed by it, fell upon steel, —steel, splendid implement of capital, mighty tool of labor, giant servant of humanity. Civilization had marched further in the hundred years since Henry Bessemer than it had ever marched in any thousand years before. Could steel lead on again?

Sebold would show them. Short enough time he had in which to show them. Short enough time. Idleness had torn down character, built up class hatred. Chaos threatened.

Get going, then! Drive, sweat, hammer, squeeze! Pound the tonnage out. Hundreds of thousands of tons to build a new United States. A tough and sturdy people wanted this new United States. Well, maybe in the tough and sturdy

"Can you take it?" B. L. Sebold inquired. "Can you dish it out?" Jimmy wanted to know.

Slavs lay the future position of the white races of the world. In any case, what harm, by vision and integrity, to gain the confidence of a whole nation of them? B. L. Sebold, working prodigiously with this in mind, working enormously with steel, put on the pressure; and there came, almost, the old-time days of steel again.

Almost. Only the twelve-hour shift, thank God, was missing. Eight hours, now. Right hours for any man. Eight hours for labor. But for the bosses—for the ones who guided labor, planned for labor, made the jobs for labor—no eight hours for them. Ten, twelve, twenty, as of old—whatever the drive, the squeeze, the pounding called for. As in the old days, civilization surging ahead was yelling again for steel, steel, steel! And with B. L. Sebold pounding out the tonnage, you may be sure the road he traveled soon got strewed with human wreckage. But this thing must be said, always: that he worked himself harder than he worked any other man. He fed men into steel the way a great general used to feed men to the guns—because he had to do it. War was greater than its generals. Steel is bigger than its captains. He fed himself to steel—very terribly, if Old Vrag told me right; mind and matter, gristle and blood and bones; including heart, if he had one. Which you may judge for yourself.

I think no better thing can be said describing the magnificence of that sister whom Mirko of Njgosh brought with him from the Balkan to America, than that as great a warrior, as great a worker as B. L. Sebold, fell in love with her. B. L. Sebold, who had always laughed at love, a feminine emotion; who had always found life's high rapture in the pitting of great strength against great odds.

Perhaps not more than half a dozen times, while Mirko of Njgosh was in America, Sebold saw his sister. But each time the conviction grew that here, at last, he saw a woman infinitely desirable, yet one who could stand by him in his battles, who could buckler him, steady him, add strength to his strength; help him, not hinder, in the tough fighting that made up his life. At last he knew, was certain; this was she, his woman. . . .

But it was not to be. Jelena of Njgosh was not for B. L. Sebold.

When Mirko sailed for Europe, his sister was not with him.

Sebold was at the dock.

"But Jelena—your sister?" Sebold said.

Sebold had come, ostensibly, for a last conference with Mirko. There was no conference.

"Your sister?" Sebold asked.

"The Balkan seethes with danger," Mirko said. "We shall, I now feel certain, launch the U.S.B. in peace. But no man knows. Death and blood has so long marked the changes in the Balkan. She shall stay here in America—incognito. Old European hatreds reach across the ocean. Even here we have deadly enemies. So she shall live more safely here, unknown. Please do not seek her. She will be safer, hidden for a while."

FOR a long time, Sebold did not see her. But the longer he was denied the sight of her, the presence of the embodied strength and beauty of that glorious mystery Jelena of Njgosh, the more he knew she was the woman he must have.

Well, if he could not see her, explore with talk the secret places of her clean mind and heart, he could, at least, work mightily for her. The United States of the Balkan had been her dream before it was her brother Mirko's. Her brother was a warrior of a line of warriors. He would have gathered his highland braves about him, and fought for the preservation of his little fatherland against the world—to the last Montenegrin. It was

she who had persuaded him that, as a little kingdom, Montenegro nevermore could exist in the changed world; but that as a sovereign state of a great Slav confederation, it might secure its brave identity unnumbered years. The United States of the Balkan was the lovely dream of Jelena of Njgosh, daughter of a race of fierce, war-hardened men. Natural enough, perhaps, that this sweet dream of peace should spring up in a Montenegrin woman's heart. Montenegrin women know the price of war in husbands, brothers, sons. Better than any other women in the world, they know it.

And so, because the Balkan Union was this woman's dream, B. L. Sebold threw himself into the work of building it to greatness with all the power that was in him.

Steel—steel—steel—steel! Steel for the mighty members of the Krvav bridge, members that weighed a hundred thousand pounds; steel for that structure's small field rivets. Steel for a quarter million tons of rails; steel for the embroidery needles of Bulgarian women. Steel not alone for U.S.B., but steel for U.S.A. Steel for a world at work again. And B. L. Sebold had seen to it that Susquehanna Steel should make its share. He had seen to it, for instance, that Susquehanna got the Krvav bridge. Susquehanna was to make that steel; to pour it, roll it, fabricate it, raise it.

When Jelena and Sebold and the others had talked about the plans for Balkan reëstablishment, she had pointed to a spot upon the map and said:

"When a great bridge is built here, it will bring peace to the world. Here is the chasm of Krvav. Down in the sunless bottom of it snarls the Krvav River, a border stream which many times has reddened with the blood of Slav and Turk. But sad to tell, it has run crimson also when Slav slew Slav. That ghastly chasm for a thousand years has stood between brothers of a blood. Conquer it. Span it. Bridges bring intermingling, understanding, peace. The frightful Krvav, bridged, will bring peace to the Balkan, peace to the world, I think. You can bridge it, Mr. Sebold?"

SEBOLD could bridge it. Erudite pencils smoked; T-squares and triangles skittered over rolls of yellow work-sheet. Slide-rules and logarithm-tables got too hot to hold—and ended up by saying that Sebold could not build it. No one could build it. Steel was not strong enough.

B. L. Sebold got the engineers together. What steel wasn't strong enough? Susquehanna steel? Listen, Sebold said. How long since figures were revised for steel's elastic limit, its tensile strength? They told Sebold. "What are these figures?" asked Sebold. They told Sebold what they were. Antiquities, said Sebold. "Listen: we have been making steel here at Susquehenna for the last five years to beat those figures twenty-five per cent." He brought out calculations, records, test-specimens, micrographic pictures—proved it. . . . "Go back," said Sebold. "Work it out again."

They came back, saying Sebold could bridge it, *if*—

"*If*, hell!" said Sebold. "If you have half the confidence in your figures that I have in Susquehanna steel, the Krvav bridge is built!"

IT became the crowning labor of his life, this Krvav bridge, mightiest of bridges, the vision of a tall and marvelously lovely girl, who dreamed of steel, the dreadful tool of Mars, bringing peace to the Balkan and the world.

It was almost like old days at Susquehanna Steel again. B. L. Sebold was Beelzebub again, a riding, driving, merciless, pitchforking devil, feeding men to steel. One of the men he tried to feed to steel was Jimmy Doan. But steel did not devour Jimmy, for Jimmy was plenty tough. Jimmy Doan was a gristly bite for any industry to chew. Besides that, Jimmy was in love with a girl on whom a man could call for strength when his own reserves of strength were gone. Jimmy Doan was a picker, what I mean—even though Mrs. Ferdinand Obermann, II, could not see it.

Into the middle of a whirlwind day, into the stress and turmoil of mighty work for the world, there came, one sultry, smoke-hazed afternoon, to take up B. L. Sebold's dollar-a-minute time, a cool, bepowdered lady, smelling ever so faintly of frangipani. She was Mrs. Ferdinand Obermann, II. Lucky for Mrs. Ferdinand Obermann, II, that she was who she was; otherwise she would never have reached first base. Otherwise, instead of reaching B. L. Sebold's office, she would have been cast from the anteroom of his office into outer darkness. For B. L. Sebold was taking the fences that day, hell-for-leather; and besides, B. L. Sebold detested the fragrance of frangipani. But being who she was, the lady got by. The lady was B. L. Sebold's sister.

"A charming interlude in a cockeyed day, Justinia," said Beelzebub. "A chair for Mrs. Obermann, Carlton. And hand me the top book, please. The one marked Central Trust and Savings."

BUT Justinia—and the lady looked it—lifted an immaculate glove.

"No, Benton," said she to Beelzebub. "Not this time. My charities can wait. This is important."

She looked toward Carlton, and Beelzebub's secretary faded noiselessly out of the room.

"You have," stated Justinia, "a young man in your mills by the name of James Bledsoe Doan."

"It's likely," said Sebold. "Doan, at the open hearth, might be James Bledsoe. Stranger things have been known. But this boy is a steel hand, if I can tell one. Good for a lot of wear and tear; but hardly a cotillion-leader. What possible use would you have for him?"

"I think, perhaps, I could use him for a son-in-law," stated Mrs. Ferdinand Obermann, II.

"Margot?" asked Sebold.

"Margot."

"Well," said Sebold, "my niece has sense."

"And why not?" asked Mrs. Obermann.

No reply forthcoming to this, Mrs. Obermann said:

"I've looked this boy up. He has good family. Poor—but who isn't? But you, my brother, can look after that. Will the boy go along?"

"Far," stated Sebold. "He's tough. He'll last for years. Long enough to get into the money. I pile it up on that sort, and pay them enough to make them stick at it."

"How much do you pay them?" Justinia wanted to know.

But all she got out of Sebold was: "Plenty. You need have no fear about that."

"Then too," suggested Mrs. Ferdinand Obermann, II, "if he should be my son—"

"He would still get plenty," Beelzebub said. "That wouldn't be held against him. But I'll warn you of this, my sister: He won't be much of a social asset. When he comes home, he will go to sleep—unless he has to go back to the mills again."

"If he keeps the O.D. sign off the bank-balance-sheets," Justinia said. "Margot will be able to manage the social side of her life without much help. But there's one other thing I wanted to speak about. It's this: your young Mr. Doan, so Margot has learned, is at present deep in a most deplorable *affaire d'amour*, with a hunky woman. How can he?"

Beelzebub laughed.

"Dead easy," said Beelzebub. "Like this. If you are Doan, you take a personal interest in your men. So one night you drop into Jednota Hall, where Tsvetko is having a party to celebrate his name-day or his *slava*, or some such important business. You only intend to say, 'Many days, Tsvetko,' and to drink his health. But first thing you know, old Tsvetko's concertina has you dancing with some warm, full-bosomed, broad-backed, milk-skinned girl of Tsvetko's people. And there you are!"

"Men!" A withering word; but B. L. Sebold did not wither easily.

"A tough lot," B. L. Sebold readily assented. "But here's a fact, Justinia: These bohunk ladies have something—something our own girls often lack. I think it's strength. They are the survivors of centuries of hard, peasant life. They have worked the earth, drawn elemental vigor from it. They add strength to a man. Often they are not beautiful by our standards; but haleness fairly glows out from their sturdy bodies. You can feel the warmth of it three feet away."

"You have felt it?" inquired Justinia.

"Even as far as four feet," grinned Beelzebub. "It is not unpleasant. They are good for men to look at, good as fertile ground. Their business has been simply being women, for a thousand years. Men sense it. My advice would be, Justinia, let nature take its course. A month, two, three. These things end soon."

"Benton," advised Beelzebub's sister, "you stick to steel. Let women judge what measures need be taken when it comes to heart affairs. Margot observed your Mr. Doan at a theater with this brood female a night or two ago. She seems to do well at this business of simply being a woman. Now, Benton, I want you—"

So B. L. Sebold promised Mrs. Ferdinand Obermann, II, his sister, that he would bear down on James Bledsoe Doan with cunning words of counsel.

"FOR that," said Mrs. F. O., II, "you are invited for dinner again, Thursday. On this day, as you know, Ferdy dines Pennsylvania Dutch. This time he has made plans with Elza, our latest

cook, for whom Berks County is responsible, for the concoction of a barbaric mess called *schnitts* and *knepp*. You will be welcome. I shall not be home. Good afternoon—and thank you, Benton."

Justinia departed, leaving behind the faint aroma of frangipani, which soon, however, was dispelled; for at just about that time Old Vrag, Blast Furnace No. 4, gave a low rumble deep down in his innards, kicked open his explosion-doors, and spouted forth a cloud of fumes and dust that tainted the air for half a mile around with sulphur and monoxide.

"Carlton!" roared Sebold. "Come in here and lift the windows higher!"

Shortly, then, B. L. Sebold, feeling much refreshed, sent a messenger forth, and soon had Jimmy Doan before him.

"Doan," Sebold said, "there's a little steel-mill story I should like to tell you. Take a chair."

Jimmy Doan said to himself: "Hooray. He wouldn't ask me to sit down if he were going to fire me."

"Once upon a time," said Beelzebub, "we had a general labor foreman here at Susquehanna, who had an eye for the broad-beamed hunky women. A sort of legend still persists in Ironville that any bohunk on his force who had a pretty woman, soon and inevitably found himself working on a night shift. How much of this was steel-works gossip, I can't say. But I do know this for fact: that one day this general labor foreman disappeared. And two years later, riggers tearing down the old storehouse building, pulled out an ancient elevator, one that operated with a long hydraulic plunger. And down at the bottom of the deep plunger pit they found a watch and pocket-knife. They had belonged to the general labor foreman. There was nothing else besides these metal things. Not even any bones. But the rats that fled from the drain-sewer at the bottom of the pit were big as rabbits."

DURING this little bedtime story, Jimmy Doan's friendly eyes had narrowed.

"What's the moral?" Jimmy asked.

"The moral is," Sebold explained, "that an eye for the broad-beamed hunky girls is no asset whatever for a man who's headed for an executive position in Susquehanna Steel. It may not land him at the bottom of an elevator pit, but it doesn't do his prestige any good to have a light-of-love who is also being faithful to the blast-furnace shifter crew."

Jimmy Doan's eyes by now were slits.

"That's all?" he asked.

"That's all," announced Beelzebub. "Good afternoon."

BUT Jimmy Doan didn't move in his chair.

"Now I'll tell one," said Jimmy:

"It happened as I was coming over here to see you, Mr. Sebold. I stopped at broad gauge scale No. 5 to give a shifting order. The scale-house was full of train-men. And when I came in, the yard-master made a reference to hunky women. I didn't like it, Mr. Sebold. So I asked him:

"'Was that one for my benefit?'

"Hell, no!" he said. "That one was like a hunky sweetheart—for everybody's benefit!" And the scale-house guffawed.

"'Well,' I said, 'this one is for your benefit!'

"Lying half under his table, Mr. Sebold, he didn't look anywhere near as hefty as he had looked standing up; so to ease my mind, I carried him outside and put him down between the rails on the scale platform. One of the trainmen weighed him while I flagged the scale track. 'One-ninety-five,' the weigher told me. So I felt all right about it, and I took him back inside and sat him up in his chair, and came on over here. I," added Jimmy Doan, "weigh one-eighty, myself."

He got up swiftly, kicked his chair backward away from him violently.

"How much do you weigh, Sebold?" inquired Jimmy Doan.

"Two-five," Beelzebub said promptly, his face a study. "And," Beelzebub added, "I apologize!"

Jimmy Doan stood dumfounded.

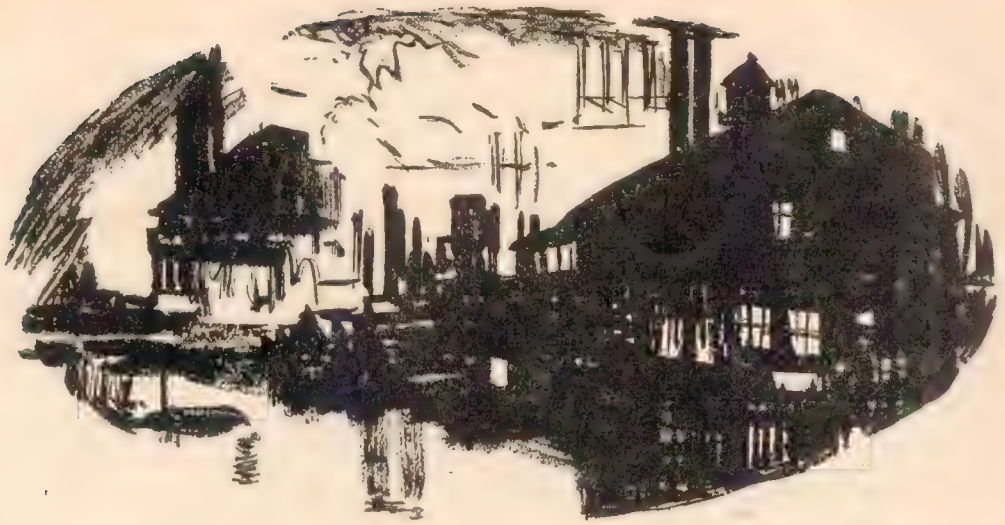
"It's seldom I apologize," stated Beelzebub, "even when I'm in the wrong."

But Jimmy still was speechless.

"You see," explained Beelzebub, "my whole office was reeking with frangipani—and I couldn't have that!"

"Great heaven, no!" Jimmy exclaimed, puzzled a bit, still fighting mad, but none the less on Sebold's side on such an issue.

"I had to get that wretched smell out of here before it was discovered, and to do it I promised, hastily, to speak to you as I did. I also felt that it might do you some good. But when you start up-cocking men like Bully Yocum, the yard-master, for talking out of turn, it looks as though you must be playing for keeps. Therefore I beg your pardon. And so good afternoon."



"Good afternoon," said Jimmy. At the office door he paused a moment. "Perhaps," he said, "I know your source of frangipani. If so, will you present my compliments, with the information that Doan and the foreign girl were married last night!"

Beelzebub sat still and watched his office door go shut. Married! Well, that was just a little tough on Justinia and Margot. But they'd get over it. As for Beelzebub, it suited him O.K. He liked 'em married. He could bear down harder on the married ones. They stood rawhiding better.

But it didn't suit B. L. Sebold quite so well when he found out, after a while, what foreign girl it was whom Jimmy Doan had married. . . .

But even Jimmy Doan himself did not know whom he had married. Not for months. All he knew was that this girl was the woman whom God had taken since creation to fashion for the circle of his arms. All Jimmy knew was that her name was Jelka Petrovitch, and that she lived with Dan Tankovitch and his wife, and that Dan said she was his *nechakinya* —his niece, a South Slav girl who had lost her father in the Great War, and whose mother had later died, and who had come to America with a brother, now back in the homeland. He did not know that Tankovitch Danilo had left his blast furnace to join the valiant little army of his fatherland against the Turk in nineteen twelve, and had served so bravely in the terrible Balkan wars that the World War, following, found him aide-de-camp to his old warrior king. Jimmy Doan did not know that Tankovitch was not only friend and aid, but also kin to royalty, and so did not suspect that Jelka Petrovitch was Jelena Petrovitch Njgosh, her blood the proud and ancient blood of Tsrnagora's royal chieftains.

"So! You wouldn't tell me, eh?" Jimmy Doan upbraided his new wife when he found out who she was. "You wanted me to be in love with Jelka Petrovitch, a woman, and not Jelena Petrovitch Njgosh, a Balkan princess. Is that a good one? As though the title, Princess, could have stopped me! Why, hell's bells, girl, I thought you were a goddess! And now," he added, kissing her, "since you have married me," and he held her close and added to the score, "I know you are!"

And Jimmy Doan was right. If you doubt it, ask the man who owns one.

FOR months Sebold gave never a thought to Jimmy Doan's private life. Then one day there was brought to his attention a Slavic celebration in Jednota Hall at Ironville; and he took the opportunity to show some friends the color and the fun of such a gathering. His big car pulled up to the curb before the hall that evening; and with his party, Sebold stepped inside a minute; and there, dressed in the gorgeous national costume of her people, wearing the perky little pork-pie cap in which no girl except a raving beauty could look dashing, he saw, for the first time, the tall and splendid bride of Jimmy Doan.

It spread then, swiftly, who she was. And all those who had held away from her had sudden change of heart. And Mrs. Ferdinand Obermann, II, took down the Social Register of Ironville, Pennsylvania, and hurriedly rewrote in

it the name of young James Bledsoe Doan, Esq., the master mechanic of the open hearth—a name which had been hastily rubbed off that favored list when Jimmy Doan had married a hunky girl.

But Mrs. Jimmy Doan was unimpressed by these activities. She knew her worth, and had been trained to know her worth the same as Jelka Petrovitch or Jelena of Njgosh.

It spread immediately, too, that this girl was the very Slavic beauty who months before had thoroughly enchanted Sebold; and everyone in Ironville watched to see what he would do to get her for himself. What B. L. Sebold wanted—that he got. All Ironville watched to see how he would wrest this tall, breath-taking woman away from Jimmy Doan.

But few appreciated what he did. Few saw the man's cold-blooded, cruel plan.

IT was the very next day after Sebold had seen the bride of Jimmy Doan, that he called Doan to his office.

"Doan," said he, "can you run the open hearth?"

Less than two years out of college! Run the open hearth! What did Jimmy Doan know about running an open-hearth plant?

Jimmy Doan said: "If the board of directors offered me your job, Mr. Sebold, I'd take a crack at it!"

Something pugnacious in that, something defiant. Not just like Jimmy Doan. Jimmy Doan wasn't given to saying; he was given to doing. But something in Sebold always fired Jimmy to speech. Somehow he always wanted to say to Sebold: "Here's one lad you won't crack. Go ahead. Try it. And be damned to you!" This day, especially, he wanted to say it. It was as though he saw a gauntlet thrown down at his feet; as though he heard the challenge to a finish fight. And suddenly, looking into Sebold's icy eyes, Doan saw, unconcealed and unmistakable, an enemy. But why?

"I was afraid the job might scare you," Sebold said.

"If you had thought that," Jimmy Doan came back, "you never would have offered it to me."

"All right," snapped Sebold. "You're superintendent of the open hearth right now. Send Strine in to me. I'll fire him!"

Jimmy Doan's eyes flashed protest.

"What?" he objected. "Without notice? But Mr. Sebold—"

"Notice?" growled Sebold. "I've given him a month to get his tonnage up. He's fired. Do you want his job, or don't you?"

Open hearth. Half a mile of grinding cranes and growling chargers, of huge molds waiting for their fiery filling; half a mile of monster furnaces, squatting sullenly, waiting to spring on a little man less than two years out of college. Clattering, chuffing dinkeys serve them, banging in scrap-boxes endlessly; broad-gauge shifters wheel great pots of molten rations for them from the blast furnaces; but the monsters sit there whispering with flame, insatiable, while the rolling mills and civilization, on its way again, bawl "steel—steel—*steel!*" Unconquerable odds for two years out of college.

Unconquerable? Says who? With good men back of you? With the woman of all women? Half-mile of bugaboos. Bring 'em on! And Jimmy Doan tackled a job ten times his size—as Beelzebub knew he would; and won—as Beelzebub had felt sure he would.

He was not brilliant, Jimmy Doan. He had a good brain, not a flaming one; he was a plugger, not a blazing fighter. But he licked that open hearth plenty. He made that half-mile row of fire-eyed jabberwocks look like a half-mile row of overgrown, mock-ferocious, jack-o'-lanterns. He made them all sit up and beg. But you can bet your last round iron dollar that the never-let-up tonnage shoving of that half-mile took it out of Jimmy Doan—as Beelzebub knew it would!

THAT was the start of B. L. Sebold's merciless campaign. Work him; hammer him. Press out of Jimmy Doan the wine of life. Bring down the old steel squeeze. Send him home to that fiery Slavic bride of his, weary, all in, spent. Beelzebub felt certain that this splendid-spirited woman would not endure disinterest. A high race-pride was hers, and royal lineage, deference and care. She had moved in a circle of nobility in a land where the lowliest peasant was a man of noble bearing and of many noble attributes.

Now, though she was far from home, she would not abide neglect; of that, Beelzebub was sure. She was strong and beautiful, and Slavic fire played all through her beautiful strong body. She was a woman to be wooed and won, and wooed and won again. But Beelzebub would see to it that there would be small time, small eagerness for wooing left in Jimmy Doan when he got Jimmy loaded for the stretch of seven years' goading, of seven

years' unremitting tonnage-drive that lay ahead for Susquehanna Steel.

More than one steel-mill widow B. L. Sebold had observed. More than one he had seen turn wistful eyes and sometimes open arms to romance elsewhere, when the grim drive for tonnage had killed romance under her own rooftree.

SO B. L. Sebold turned the pressure on, hitched fast the load, started the driving which was to drive Jimmy Doan out of the arms of his bride and into a welter of gas and grease, and flame and flowing metal; into a bedlam of whining cables and growling gears and thundering rolls; into days and weeks and months of last-notch effort that would drain him of the very dregs of strength.

Oh, he was fair enough, in his way, that hard-burned, fireproofed salamander. He drove himself harder than any man beneath him. Harder than Jimmy Doan. He could stand more than any other man; more than a dozen ordinary men. He could stand more than Jimmy Doan. But that was Jimmy Doan's tough luck. In Sebold's world, the best man won—the biggest, toughest, longest-staying man. Beelzebub would be ready to take what Jimmy Doan had no strength left to hold.

It was as though Beelzebub had forced on Jimmy Doan a mighty duel, with the weapon not of steel, but the weapon steel itself—a battle tool for giants.

Early in the long, hard struggle with the open hearths, the young and lovely goddess who had mated Jimmy Doan, came to him, protesting naïvely in her delightful broken English:

"Jeemy. Dees steel! She's *teshko djelo,* Jeemy: How do you say? Toff job!"

"Dees steel!" Jimmy could have taught her to put her unaccustomed Slavic tongue between her teeth to make *"th"* for *"this."* But he would not do it. She learned it soon enough herself, to Jim's immeasurable regret.

"Dees steel! She's *zao,* Jeemy—bad! T'ree times dis week you have gone away from me, your *mlada,* Jeemy Doan, your bride, to leave her sleeping, very lonesome, in the night!"

Pale gray eyes, warmed with flecks of gold, ringed with long raven lashes. Red generous Slavic mouth. Wild Slavic blood. Heavy hair, blue-black, drawn tight upon a shapely head. A pin or two stolen from that sleek tight knot, and down the blue-black cloud came tumbling, wanton, about wide snowy shoulders such as Aphrodite might have envied. But Jimmy Doan went back to work again that night, and worked till dawn, and licked the cockeyed open hearths to an elegant fare-thee-well. And then he came home, victor; but he fell across his bed, full-clothed, and went to sleep with luscious Slavic kisses warm upon his mouth.

Jimmy Doan licked that long half-mile of furnaces, all right, and licked it so that it stayed licked. He was no brilliant man. It took him twelve long months to do it thoroughly; twelve months robbed irretrievably of those rare gifts which an Italian proverb says are best, by far, of all the gifts that gods bestow on men—the gifts of love and leisure. He beat that open hearth, but that beating took it out of Jimmy Doan—as Beelzebub knew it would.

But finally he had it under thumb, that long half-mile of hell; and rails and rails and rails started to stream across the sea to be laid down across the Balkan hills. And in his open-hearth plant young Doan had built an organization of men who loved him, a loyal gang who could keep the rail-mill choked with steel while Jimmy Doan went fishing.

Only, Jimmy Doan did not care for fishing. Jimmy Doan heaved a sigh of victory and relief, and opened wide his arms to Jelka Petrovitch—to Jelena Petrovitch Njgosh, to his wife.

With his wife's strong sweet body close against him, Jimmy Doan said: "I'm Jimmy Doan. What is your name?"

And she said, "Jelka"—softly, the *"j"* like our *"y,"* surrender whispering in the rich warm word. "Jelka Petrovitch," she added.

She was always Jelka Petrovitch when close-held in her husband's arm; for it was Jelka Petrovitch with whom Jimmy Doan had fallen in love, and married.

"Let's see," said Jimmy Doan reflectively. "We've met before, haven't we? Two or three years ago. Weren't we two married, or something? Come here; let's look at you."

BUT scarcely had they drawn a deep breath in the paradise of each other's arms when B. L. Sebold made his second move.

He sent for Jimmy Doan. He practically snatched him out of Jelena Petrovitch's warm embrace.

"Doan," said he, "you did a good job at the open hearth. How would you like to take on the rail-mill too?"

Rail-mill! Three years out of college! Three years filled right up to capacity with fighting monster open hearths, tooth and claw, life and death. When did Jimmy Doan have any time to learn about rolling rails?

Jimmy Doan said: "For how much money?"

"For plenty," replied Beelzebub. "I haven't got it figured yet. I tell you. You persuade Mrs. Doan to come to my sister's dinner tonight, and I'll tell you how much, there."

"But I don't believe—" said Jimmy.

"Oh, I know," said Beelzebub. "She has sent her regrets to my sister, as usual. Not that I blame her at all. Each time I see her, I feel like offering my apologies again for speaking as I did to you in my office several years ago—for talking as I did, unwittingly, about Jelena of Njgosh."

"You spoke to me about Yelka Petrovitch that day," said Jimmy Doan coldly. "As you do now. She was the girl I married."

That wasn't exactly Jimmy Doan. Jimmy Doan was never a man to nurse a grievance. Jimmy Doan was quickly, easily forgiving. But the very nature of Jimmy Doan was at war with the nature of B. L. Sebold. And deep within the consciousness of Doan, there stirred suspicion now as to why the man before him was a foe. Dimly the realization came to Jimmy that a man might kill, to possess a woman beautiful as Jelena of Njgosh.

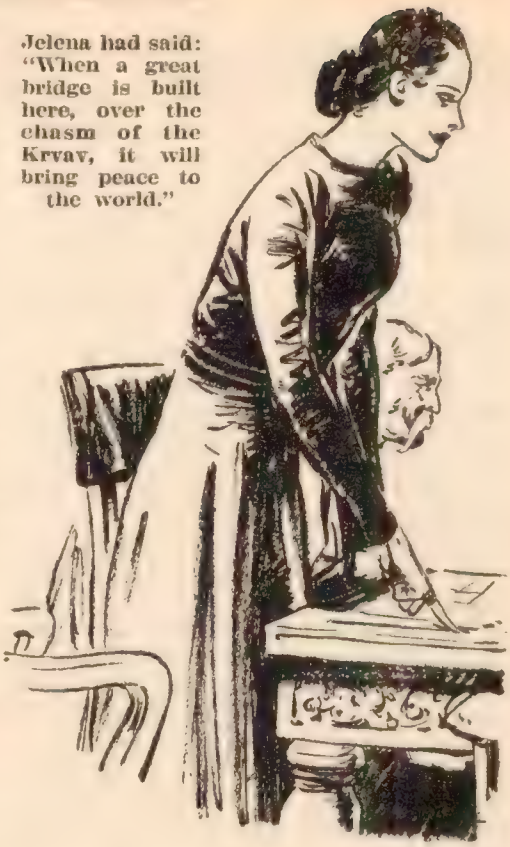
"You didn't know who she was?" Sebold's question bristled with doubt.

"No," said Jimmy. "I wasn't concerned with *who* she was. I could see *what* she was."

Beelzebub had no reply to that. There wasn't a reply to that.

"I'd like it," then said Jimmy Doan, "if others might know what kind of woman she is, and not just *who* she is. For just that reason I shall call her up right now and ask her to accept your sister's invitation. But I can't be there with her, Mr. Sebold; you know that. I turn gas into three new furnaces tonight. I'll work through. I'll tell her, though, that you will take her to the dinner and bring her home again. You'll do it?"

BEELZEBUB took Helen Doan to dinner; he spent a splendid evening with her, and he took her home again. While Jimmy Doan finished sixteen hours on his job. But Sebold had just finished twice that long a trick. Night before, they had blown a new blast furnace in.



Jelena had said: "When a great bridge is built here, over the chasm of the Krvav, it will bring peace to the world."

All day, straight through the night, black coffee in the morning, and all day again. Thirty-four hours. And at dinner that evening, clear-eyed, keen-minded, straight-backed! All a man—that Beelzebub!

Jimmy Doan, too, was a full-sized portion of man. He took the rail-mill by the slack of the pants and the scruff of the neck, and he shook it till its universal joints clattered. And when he finished with it, it was breaking, every month, the record it had made the month before.

In less than half a year he was in Sebold's office again.

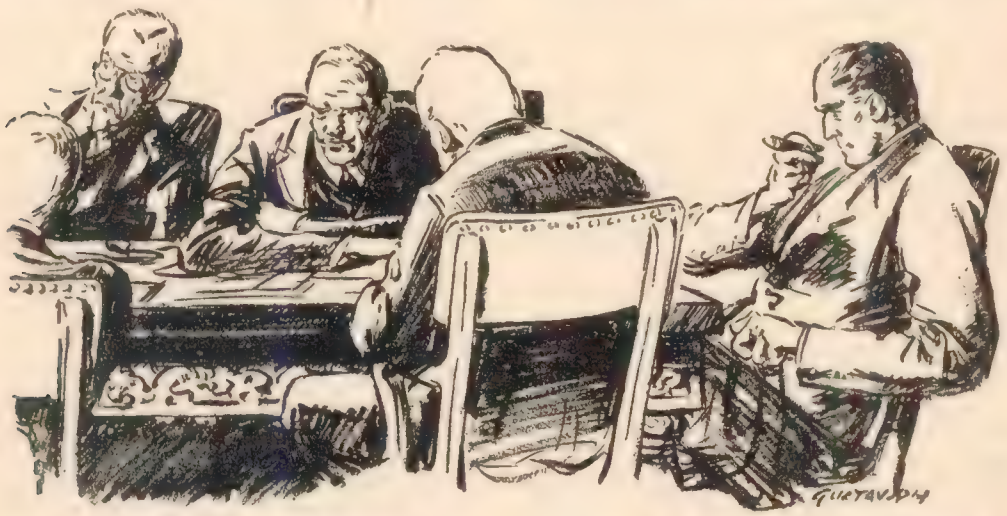
"Starting today," said Sebold, "you're boss of all the rolling mills. I'm firing Smalley."

"Smalley?" Doan said. "Why, he works like the devil. He's given the best thirty years out of his life to Susquehanna Steel!"

"They're the only years out of his life I want," stated Beelzebub. "How hard he works doesn't count. It's how many tons he gets out. We've been picking up speed. He's been falling behind. Do you want his job, or don't you?"

One more year, with those best gifts, love and leisure, stolen—stolen from two who knew well how to use them. Another sweating, grinding, driving year that drove love out. Not strength of love,

not depth of love, not faithfulness and unswerving loyalty, not the standing side by side against the world. But what of the romance of love, the fragrant ecstasies? What of the ardent wooings and the maddening surrenders? What of celestial hours spent together which bind two with a chain as soft as though of welded rose-leaves; but which is strong as though forged of steel? Bonds such as



these are made in hours of balmy leisure.

Balm, eh? Brother, there is no balm in Ironville, Pennsylvania. Leisure! At Ironville the tall stacks smoke again. They belch grime twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. They set their pall upon Thanksgiving Day; they smudge the snow of Christmastide; they smear with soot the pure, white-shining face of Easter. Holidays, did you say? Sundays? Have you any idea how much it costs to let an open hearth cool off and heat it up again? Six days, in Ironville, they labor; and on the seventh day they work like hell. . . . For another year Jimmy Doan came to his woman weary, spent, the very wine of life squeezed out of him—as Beelzebub planned he should.

But at that year's end the rolling mills at Susquehanna Steel were pouring their products into the U.S.B. Slab mill, billet mill, plate mill, structural mill, merchant mill—all cracking records. Jimmy Doan licked them—Jimmy the plugger—Jimmy, who had the gift of gaining the loyalty, gaining the love, of men. But before he had them licked, those mills had given their young and inexperienced master, five years out of college, such a catfight that he never looked the same again—as Beelzebub knew they would.

But he tamed them, Jimmy did. He could leave them, purring, at six o'clock, P.M., and find them purring still when he came on at eight A.M. next day.

So Jimmy Doan leaned back one evening and looked across the dinner-table.

"No, lady," said he, "you are quite mistaken. The gentleman is not returning to the rolling mills tonight. Would you look, now, at this enormous chair—with nothing but a husband in it, *draga*."

Draga. A nice word, that: *Lover.*

"*Draga,* I've got them licked," said Jimmy Doan. "They'll run without me now. I've built one grand gang at the rolling mills. I can go jump off the dock right now, this minute, and those mills will keep on breaking records for another year. Come over here."

SHE was over there. She was in his arms so close right then, that you couldn't have pounded a playing-card between them with a rivet-hammer.

"Helen Doan," said Jimmy Doan, "I have been one washout as a husband. . . . Take your hand off my mouth. It's true. I have been. I have been a galley-slave wedded to a *vila,* a Balkan mountain nymph. Good thing you learned, you Montenegrin women, through long and bitter centuries, how to give your men to battle."

"Yes, Jeemy Doan," said Jimmy's wife, a little sadly, looking down the years. "We learned that."

"But don't you ever think, you red-lipped thing," said Jimmy Doan, "that I haven't cursed every year, month, week, day, night, this job I've got—this battle that has kept me from your arms. You're beautiful, Jelena, beautiful as sin, and clean as starlight. And listen, woman:

for the love of pig-iron, don't learn to kiss me any better than you do! There are limits. Have a care. Do you want me suddenly to vanish with a blinding flash and a loud report, just when I've got the cockeyed rolling mills licked?"

Had you seen Jelena Petrovitch at that time, then mother of two, you would have easily seen why Jimmy Doan loved her five times as much after five years as he did the day he married her. Each of her children had added new loveliness to her, when you would have sworn no woman could have grown more lovely. With the first coming of the miracle of the stir of life within her, all her entrancing, flattened curves had lifted toward a voluptuousness which motherhood had brought to maddening perfection. And her two lovely children added gentleness and melting sweetness to her air of pride; added strength to her superb strength of soul; and a possessive loyalty to the man whose love had given her these two small sons that boded ill for any who might think to spoil that love. Her gold-gray eyes were very deep with love's deep secret mysteries, and she moved with all the surety and grace of one who had drunk deeply intoxicating drafts of life.

"*Kako te ime?*" inquired this woman gayly. "What is your name? Jimmy Doan? Why, that's right, to be sure! I had almost forgotten. And haven't we met before? Weren't we married or something? Aren't you—"

But Jimmy Doan interrupted:

"Hey!" thundered he. "Stop that. Who's been teaching you to say *'th'?* Want a divorce, do you? Well, then, say, 'Dot's right,' not, 'That's right.' Remember, lose your accent, and you lose your husband."

"Ah rite, beeg honky," laughed Helen Doan, going back five years to Jelka Petrovitch and her English. "Jeemy Doan—dot seem right." Her strong arms went tight. "Sure t'ing, dot's right. Dot face, dot maybe I forget—so long time I don't see dot face. But me—I recognize dot keess! . . . Ah, Jimmy Doan, we Montenegrin women have learned how to welcome our men when they come back to us from battle! Like this, Jimmy Doan!"

NEXT day Sebold called Doan to his office.

"You did a fine job with the rolling-mill tonnage," said Beelzebub. How would you like to tackle—"

"Fine," said Jimmy. "You're on!"

In the last five years Jimmy Doan had come through such wars as made him unafraid to tackle anything.

So, five years out of college, he found himself head of the Chesapeake plant.

What did Jimmy Doan know about managing a steel plant? A whole steel plant, ore-docks to loading yard? And more specifically, what did he know about rolling skelp and making pipe?

Not every steel man can make skelp. Pipe-steel and pipe require the master's touch, the specialist's technique. And Chesapeake was starting to make pipe. But for a month the pipe that the Chesapeake plant made, when subjected to test pressures, busted wide open—no, not *burst;* it was worse than that—busted wide open like fire-engine-house doors. And steel executives in droves went off their nuts.

So the general superintendent of the Chesapeake plant signed a receipt for a swift kick in the pants, and Jimmy Doan took over. And what did Jimmy Doan, only five years out of Valley Tech's tough math' classes know about making pipe? Not a thing. But steel men all over the country knew Jimmy Doan as a white man—a first-class man to work for; and he hadn't been at Chesapeake two days till a melter from Youngstown, where they know how to make skelp, came to Chesapeake, and tackled Jimmy for a job. Next day a couple of heaters came in from the West. Then a skelp-roller or two. Men liked to work for Jimmy.

ANOTHER year of desperate mauling battle; another year of steady bearing-down that took the juice out of Jimmy Doan as though he had spent the twelve months in a letter-press.

At the end of twelve months, thanks to brass-bound insides, thanks to a wife like Jelena Petrovitch, the United States of the Balkan was knee-deep in pipe, and Susquehanna Steel was selling more pipe to the world at large than any tube-mill east of Youngstown.

So one night, at the end of the twelve months, Jimmy Doan was dressing in his room. Dressing for keeps—split tails, platinum studs, and the soot out of his ears. Jimmy Doan was dressing to attend a symphony. Jimmy and his best girl were going places. . . . A party of worth-while friends, celestial music; then good things to eat, dancing, good things to talk about. He had the Chesapeake plant licked, and he whistled to himself as he battled with his tie.

There came, just then, three light taps on Jimmy's chamber door. Three—and each tap signified a word.

Jimmy focused his eye with care upon his door and said: "Come in."

"How do I look?" a vision, entering, asked. How did she look? In slithery, gleamy yellow—how did she look? The symphony that night was to be Tschaikowsky's immortal "Pathétique." Jimmy Doan loved it. He loved to sit with his eyes closed to orchestra and leader, and watch the hosts of gods and men march by with gallant banners into the dreadful beauty of What Next. But—

"I would not leave this room tonight," said Jimmy Doan, "to hear the music of the spheres. That's how you look."

"But if we go," inquired Jelena Petrovitch demurely, her wise gray eyes atwinkle, "will other men look at me?"

"Lady," said Jimmy Doan, "up to tonight the business of looking at lovely women had only reached its infancy. And if we go to the theater, I shall have to poke every gentleman in the audience on the nose for what he is thinking when he looks at you."

"Then we shall go," said Jelena Petrovitch. "It's sweeter to be yours after many other men have looked at me. . . . No, no! Ah, Jeemy Doan! My lovely yellow sequins!"

And then the telephone on Jimmy's dresser rang.

But strange to say, he did not simply let it ring. Instead, he went with eagerness to the jangling, rude intruder.

He listened, and a grim smile came and played across his kindly mouth—a tight, hard smile.

It was Sebold.

"Come up to Ironville," the cold voice ordered. "Be here inside of an hour. You'll find me on the plant. Good-by."

Still grimly smiling, Jimmy Doan set the instrument down and turned to his wife.

"*Draga,*" said Jimmy Doan, when he had finished the absorbing ceremony which the telephone had interrupted, "for six years I've been slaving for this night."

FOR Jimmy Doan knew what was up. Inside an hour, Sebold had ordered. Pretty fast stepping for a hundred miles. Ironville, there could be no doubt, was in a jam. A month-old strike was on at Ironville.

At Ironville, where B. L. Sebold had headquarters, the forces that hated to see America at work were making a desperate stand. It was, perhaps, their last stand. If they made one more dismal failure at their job of keeping men in idleness, it would mean that America was hopelessly prosperous again, and they would either have to go to work, or else transfer their vast organization to some less tolerant, less abundant land. But with their whole strength arrayed against Beelzebub for a finish fight, the plant at Ironville was dynamite to handle.

SINCE Jimmy Doan had left the Susquehanna plant, it had become a ripe spot for those who live by stirring up class hate. Replacing Jimmy Doan, and carrying a new title, assistant general manager, had come to Susquehanna a scion of the wealthy family of Degrasse. Old Jacques Degrasse owned more stock in Susquehanna Steel than any other man. Young Jack Degrasse had picked a good grandfather, and thereby came to be the second in command at Ironville. Not that he failed of brilliant mental parts. New England Tech had never graduated any man with higher standing or with keener brain. But Jack Degrasse just was not socially equipped to last at Susquehanna Steel. Following the precepts of many generations of his people, he placed all workingmen in the same classification where he placed canal-boat mules; and unfortunately, his family training had not included any lessons in the hiding of such feelings. Needless to say, the hired help at Susquehanna disliked intensely this young man's insides. And above him in command was B. L. Sebold, who thought of workmen in terms of furnace-fodder. So when the trouble-stewers started cooking up a mess at Susquehanna, not even the loyal hands, not even the Ironville old-timers, famed for loyalty, would stand behind the dearly hated brethren highest up.

And so one day a blast furnace, tapping, could not be shut off, because some one had tampered with the mud-gun; and a great lake of liquid pig-iron spread destruction and delay. And one night when a violent thunderstorm swept the plant, the hack-sawed leg of a high-tension tower gave way, and wires carrying fearful voltages fell across steel rails and buildings, flashing blue-white spurts deadlier than the lightning. And on another time, loose nuts on the foundation bolts of a gigantic flywheel's bearing allowed that spinning monster to wrench itself free and send annihilation ripping through a whole great rolling mill.

So Jimmy Doan said to his wife: "The next stop, Ironville. Once more no symphony of any kind for us, *mlada*. Once more Sebold says steel instead. Come along with me, will you, *draga?* This is going to be a big night for us Doans."

Would she go with her man? A half-hour later, still dressed in gleamy yellow and a great warm coat, she was seated back of Jimmy Doan in a little roaring cabin watching the moonlit Susquehanna rush swiftly southward under them. Another half-hour, and their small plane wheeled to a stop before the company hangar outside the Susquehanna plant.

"Take a taxi to the hotel, *draga,*" Jimmy said. "I won't be long."

A minute more, and he was striding through a group of company police who stood guard at the main gate of the plant. Old Pero Pokopats, the night watchman at the gate, smiled when he saw Jimmy.

"Ah, Meest'r," Pero said, "good t'ing see you come t'rough my gate some more. Too much tro'ble come dis stil vorks ven you be gone 'vay. You plenty fix dot tro'ble now wit' men—eh, Meest'r?"

Jimmy Doan laid a hand on Pero's shoulder, passing. Then in another minute he was standing across the desk from B. L. Sebold in his office.

"Doan," said Beelzebub, without preamble, "you did a first-class job down at Chesapeake. How would you like—"

"Sebold," said Jimmy Doan, "you did an inexcusably rotten job up here at Ironville. How would you like to straighten it out yourself?"

BEELZEBUB never moved. He sat still behind his desk, and looked at Jimmy Doan with eyes that veiled all emotion.

"Listen, Sebold," said Jimmy Doan, "I have been looking forward to this day for six long years. For six years you've been loading me with jobs ten times my size. I never was any boy wonder, and you knew it. You knew that the only way I could lick these jobs would be by working myself deaf, dumb and cockeyed. And you had me sized up for one of those chumps who would die for dear old Susquehanna Steel, before he'd quit. But you had me all wrong, Sebold. I've been ready to quit, for six years. I've only been waiting for the best time to do it. And that's right now. For now, for the first time since I came to Ironville, you really need me. Now, for the first time, I can do something for you that you can't do better yourself. Fact is, I doubt if you could do it at all yourself. I can handle this strike. The reason you haven't been able to handle it, is because men hate your guts—and you can count me in on that!"

SEBOLD sat still. He was thinking, cold-bloodedly: "How can I keep this man at work?" Not only did Sebold need him now; but if this strike could be loaded on his back, right after the Chesapeake battle, the man would go down.

"Who messed up this Ironville plant?" demanded Jimmy Doan. "You and young Jack Degrasse! So you fired Degrasse, and sent for Doan to fix it. Well, fix it yourself, Sebold. And you'd better be swift about it. The boys blew a couple gas-producers to hell last night, and an open-hearth furnace is due to go up through the roof tonight, rumor says, molten steel and all. How much of that stuff do you think the board of directors is going to stand? About one more week of this strike, and you'll go off this plant so fast the seat of your pants will hit the back of your neck. B. L. Sebold canned! Beelzebub fired out of hell! Would that be worth serving six years to see?"

Still Sebold sat silent behind his desk. He sat there, slid down on the back of his neck, with his legs stretched out and his arms folded over his barrel chest. He had to keep Doan at work. Here was the first sign of a crack-up, this tirade of words from a usually quiet man. Soon he'd be storming about in his home. Sebold nearly had him! Let him blow off steam; then, when he felt ashamed of this let-down, nail him; spike him fast to a back-breaking job with a raise so big that he couldn't refuse it. So Sebold sat listening, saying never a word.

"So I'm walking out on you now," Doan said, "when you need me—and you need me plenty. Look at you, bogged down there. You look as if they've run you through the forty-four-inch mill four or five passes. Your tail's dragging, Sebold. If it weren't, you'd be up on your feet now, heaving me out of your office. Or trying."

There was a challenge, if ever a man got a challenge. A bit melodramatic, a bit undergraduate, maybe; but when did those qualities ever stop a good fight? Yet Sebold sat still on the back of his neck, and continued to look with inscrutable eyes at Doan. Sebold had not yet quite figured this business out.

"Well," said Doan, "I'm leaving for Pittsburgh. They're hiring anyone out

there who can tell a tuyère brick from a potful of pig. And Sebold,"—here Doan leaned his fists upon Sebold's desk, the closer to look the man in the eye,—"and Sebold," said Doan, "I'm taking with me the woman you've wanted to get!"

Sebold stirred and came up in his chair. For the first time, now, he spoke.

"Oh, so that's it?" said Sebold.

"That," said Jimmy Doan, "is it."

"I never gave you credit for imagination, Doan!"

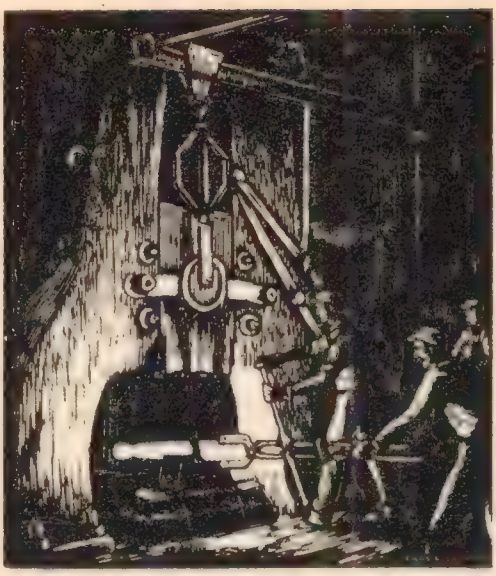
"Imagination?" Jimmy Doan laughed. He laughed with his voice, but not with his lips or his eyes. "So I've imagined these last six years, then, have I? I've imagined, then, that you've been shoving me into one man-wrecking job after another! It was fifty-fifty every crack, whether I licked the job or the job licked me. And I'd scarcely get a decision over one, till you'd kick me, break-neck, into another bigger one. But that was all a nightmare, nothing real about it! I've imagined all these swift promotions, have I, over better men—over men with twice the brains and five times the service and experience. I don't know whether they'd have got better results than I, or not; but I do know this: they'd have got them with a quarter the blood-sweating I put into them. Imagination, eh? Me on the plant seven days a week, and three nights out of seven; working myself to the edge of a crack-up, and drugged with fatigue every time I did manage to get home. Think I couldn't add that up? As a husband I might as well have been one of the Seven Sleepers. How long does a young, strong, beautiful woman stand for that sort of life? Think I didn't ask myself that question a thousand times in six years?

"Well, I'll tell you the answer to it, Sebold. There's one kind of woman who will stand for it till their men are dead. For centuries that kind have been giving their men up to battle. They have been known for centuries as the world's most faithful wives. What's six years to a Montenegrin woman? Sebold, you never had a chance!"

With a bleak smile Sebold said:

"Maybe I figured seven years, Doan. You wouldn't want to take a little gamble on another year? The job is General Superintendent here. It's a man's job. And the salary is what you name it."

"Gamble?" exploded Jimmy Doan. "What have *you* got that *I* want? More money? No sale, Sebold. For six years I've been passing up the stuff that kings



have paid empires to get. More work? No thanks, Sebold. I just had some. In other words, tonight's my night. Tonight I'm loading your backbone, not you mine. I'm walking out on you. And here's my bundle. You tote it. It's all yours. You've been piling it on me for half a dozen hellish years. Here—hang it around your own neck. In the shape you're in, and with the rest of the mess you're staggering under now, it ought to sink you."

Jimmy Doan strode to the door. He paused there to give Sebold the opportunity for a come-back—if he had any come-back. But Sebold had slid down once more upon the back of his neck, and was looking after Doan in an unfathomable silence.

"And keep remembering this," was Jimmy Doan's last shot. "When I land a job in Pittsburgh, I'll clean you of every good steel-hand you've got. Men like to work for Jimmy Doan. They'll come where I hang up my coat; wait and you'll see. . . . And thanks for listening. I've been waiting for six years to do this song and dance. And so with these few words, Sebold, I quit you cold as a corpse. Good-by. And try Katrina Kurva next time you go woman-hunting. You know the habits of that kind."

Jimmy Doan bowed in a farewell salute, and was gone.

THERE came, perhaps an hour later, light steps in the hall outside Beelzebub's office. His head upon his arms, the light footsteps did not arouse him. Beelzebub was fast asleep, catching an hour in days of sleepless hours. It took

the closing of his office door to bring his head up from his desk.

Then as though a lightning-flash had galvanized him, up he came standing. Weary and fire-scorched, sleep-starved and smoky-eyed, up he came, straight-backed as a hussar, weeks of strike fatigue falling from him as by magic.

"Jelena Petrovitch!"

There was a woman to renew a spent man. There was a woman to send wearied fighting-men back into the fighting. A woman strong-bodied, heroic. A woman to steady a man even while she made his pulses leap. How could such splendid strength express itself in sheer bewildering feminine grace? Wide-apart gray-gold eyes, full steady-lipped mouth.

"Jelena Petrovitch!"

THERE was victory in Sebold's voice. She had come to him, late at night, across a dangerous, striking plant. He had won. Doan had quit the fight. Dueling with that familiar mighty weapon, steel, Sebold had conquered again; had beaten down his man; outfought, outstayed, outworked him—broken him! She was through with Doan.

"He told me what he said to you," said Jelena Petrovitch.

"And so you came to me!"

"And so I came to you."

There she stood: beautiful, magnificent, something unearthly in her loveliness and strength—her gray eyes fringed with jet, her hair more blue than black, her skin smooth ivory on her fine-boned face, her body tall and broad and exquisite. She had come to him!

Sebold stepped round his desk and walked toward her, his arms tense for the feel of her, inside them. But one step from her, standing there at graceful ease, he stopped. It was as though a hand had reached, and lay against his chest.

"But what he said of you could not be true," said Jelena Petrovitch. "He said you tried to kill him with the mills—for me! But I know why he talked to you like that—he, Jimmy Doan, who does not talk, but works. He was spent, Mr. Sebold. He was nearly broken. But by steel, Mr. Sebold; not by you. Steel is a merciless giant. Look. It has nearly broken you too. So you are to forget the angry things he said."

The pressure of that unseen hand against the chest of Sebold, seemed somehow heavier now; and doubt awoke.

He said: "I beg your pardon. . . . Here." And placed a chair for her.

"Tell me—what brought you to my office at this hour?"

"The Krvav bridge," said Jelena Petrovitch. "It must be built. It must be built with speed. Its towers must point like church-spires toward the peaceful heaven. Its steel must meet above the bloodiest chasm of the world, as though the arms of brothers reached out, clasping hands. Steel must do this for men. And steel must hurry. Sinister forces work against the peace of the world. You people here, in this great blessed land of peace, cannot know about such things. And so I came to tell you. I've given my man back to steel again, the steel that takes him from me night and day. He promised me to help you build the Krvav bridge."

"Doan?" he said blankly.

"He is at the open-hearth furnaces now."

"But you—" said Sebold. "He never should have let you come along into these dangerous, striking mills."

"I did not come with him," she said. "I followed after. He would be afraid if he knew I had come; and he must not be afraid tonight. He must stop the strike tonight. But there is no real danger in the mills for me. I am of the Petrovitch Njgosh. Old Pero Pokopats, the gateman, let me come into the plant without a word. And there are many South Slav men at Susquehanna Steel; old mill-hands who have been called back to work. They helped to build America, these old South Slav men; and now they eagerly help to build a new United States in their old land. They do not blow up furnaces. Other men do that. My countrymen, indeed, will help prevent this blowing up. The furnaces are my man's furnaces; and I am of the Petrovitch Njgosh. I have walked unharmed into many black places on your plant tonight, Mr. Sebold, and into many fiery places, and have talked to many men. The strike will end tonight."

SEBOLD looked at her. Women of her blood had followed their men to battle many a time in centuries bygone. Thus came, perhaps, the ancient Balkan legend of the *vila*, the fire-winged mountain nymph that flew to succor wearied fighting men. But never was any *vila* beautiful as Jelena Petrovitch.

"When your husband talked to me," said B. L. Sebold, "he knew what he was saying. Men know what other men will do for love of a woman like you."

She smiled.

"For love?" she said. "If you have loved me, all these six years since we met, that makes me very proud—and sad also. But if you would have harmed my man, or killed our romance, then you did not love me. Then you merely wanted me. You do not take from one you love—you give to one you love."

Her speech was slow. It is so her people speak. Her voice was husky, rich—as beautiful as she; mezzo-soprano, quiet because of poise and pride, vibrant because of pulsing life and love. What maddening music must throb through it with her heart leaping against her husband's heart.

Sebold brushed his arm, as though with weariness, across his eyes; but it was to hide the pain that he should never hear such rapturous melody.

"Whatever it may have been before," said Sebold, "from this hour on I love you, Helen Doan."

HE knew now that this woman was not for him; he had acknowledged it when he said, "I love you, Helen Doan." . . . Helen Doan. For the first time she was no longer Jelena Petrovitch Njgosh to him. She was Helen Doan, Jimmy Doan's woman. Completely his, unalterably his. Sebold had sent her husband to her—spent, drained, sagging, sure that the splendid vitality of her, the glowing healthiness, the warm desires of vigor, youth and love, would play sad havoc with her romance with her husband. But now he knew that no such thing could happen. She had poured strength out of her glorious strength, instead, filling the wells from which her husband drew, so that not once had they been drained in all those years of merciless promotions.

So there was nothing left but steel. Steel, he had always said, came first. He had boasted it. And now had come a time when B. L. Sebold saw with different eyes. But bitterly the order he had so long chosen had to stand. So he turned to steel again, and gave it spirit and body and brain; put his whole self into steel—and dreadfully, if Old Vrag told me right—Old Vrag, who is Blast Furnace No. 4 at Susquehanna Steel.

Steel, then—and heads up in the hole.

Krvav steel; that is the steel to come. Steel for a bridge so great that only a woman's impractical mind could have visioned it. But let impractical woman vision some prodigious task, and men will do it for her, proving to their own astonishment that the job was not impractical after all. So woman, one day, will abolish war. So, indeed, Jelena Petrovitch Njgosh, the daughter of a warrior race, made a magnificent start in this direction when she envisioned the Krvav bridge. A gigantic job, that: to bridge the Krvav chasm, to bring peace to the Balkan, to bring peace, maybe, to the world.

The Krvav bridge was to be a triumph for the sort of steel that the world had come to know as Susquehanna steel. It was to be the engineering climax of B. L. Sebold's life. It was to be more than that to Sebold. It was to be the magnificent expression of his love. . . .

It stands, now, spanning Krvav. Steel men go half across the world to look at it. And gazing up into the delicate terrific tracery, they think about one thing: They think about the man who made it possible—Beelzebub, who planned it, figured it, made steel for it; but who vanished off the earth, completely, utterly, before a member of it ever was erected. And steel men, gazing at Krvav's heroic span, wonder just how much of B. L. Sebold actually is in that climax of his work upon this earth. How much of Sebold's earthly fist-power did a man see when he saw that bridge? How much of the man's celestial dreaming? More than steel men allow; for the terrific love of him is in it.

Love? How much love goes into the rolling of a thousand tons of angle-irons? Mention love to some old steel-hand in the same breath with the mention of Beelzebub, and you are likely to have a man laugh himself seven-eighths to death before your very eyes! And yet I know what Stari Vrag told me—Old Vrag, Blast Furnace No. 4 at Susquehanna Steel. All of B. L. Sebold went into Krvav bridge.

Steel, then, since there was nothing else in life for B. L. Sebold. Steel for the Krvav bridge. And everybody hunch his tail in, for the air is going to be full of rawhide. Krvav steel is three months back of schedule, what with the strike in Ironville. Even the mountains of special ore for Krvav's special steel had scarcely started to get stocked.

AND suddenly, far up in the Great Lakes iron ranges, pressure came. Finnish laborers, their boots blood-red with ore, shovel-runners tearing down the ruddy mountains, dinkey-skinners, transportation men strung along a thousand miles, felt the squeeze that came from

the lair of Beelzebub, down in Pennsylvania. And soon red dirt, ripped from its native hills, began to pile up mountain-wise beneath the lofty ore-bridge that spanned the vast yards at Ironville.

And a thousand miles to the south of Ironville, men felt the pressure too, where at Nipe Bay, on Cuba's northern coast, the great holds filled with the high nickel ores of Mayari. And soon that too was heaping beside the red transplanted hills of Minnesota.

BEELZEBUB was not, like Mohammed, going to the mountain. Prayer? Faith? That hard-boiled heathen? Not much. He was using works! And the mountains were coming to him!

The ore is stocked. The ore-bridge fills the bins that feed Old Vrag. The iron ranges of the Great Lakes, the hills of Cuba, are headed toward the far Balkan. Krvav pig-iron is to come.

Into the steel for Krvav bridge, Beelzebub now put himself. And in what way could he better do it than by making pig-iron for it? Doan would take care of refining the pig to steel—Doan, who was general superintendent, now, at Ironville. Doan was an open-hearth man. The steel would be safe with Doan.

But pig-iron, that first essential—even Dan Tankovitch could not tell Sebold anything about pig-iron. The big stacks were his racket.

There is a bigness to blast-furnace men. There is deliberation, calm. There is power in them. They work with catastrophic forces. Pure iron comes to man only in meteorites, out of the infinite cosmic laboratories. Nature would take a million years, maybe, to get the iron from Mesabe's hills, using the heat of some unimaginable star-collision to smelt them down. But B. L. Sebold—Tankovitch Danilo—will do it in an hour. Small wonder if those two were friends.

Small wonder B. L. Sebold loved the stacks. There is a vast and whispering dimness all about them. The very air about them carries the feel of power. Through the peephole of a tuyère, you can see the swirling whirlwind of the red-hot blast, the molten downpour hellish as Gomorrah's. In the huge shadows of the stacks there lurks perhaps the twilight of the gods, the *Götterdämmerung*. Well, if a stout heathen god must go, how better than in smoke and flame, after a finish fight?

Beelzebub for months kept close to Stari Vrag, watching that grim old panting fire-belly turn out pig-iron for the Krvav steel. Beelzebub took no chances. In every steel plant one blast furnace for some reason makes finer pig than all the rest. It is mysterious. The same charge may go into all, the practice be identical, the foremen equal masters of their craft—yet one furnace makes the finest pig.

So it was with No. 4 at Susquehanna Steel—with Vrag, the pampered, bullied pet of big Dan Tankovitch, the favorite of B. L. Sebold. Old Vrag made all the pig-iron for the Krvav steel. Soon the last heat of it would gurgle dreadfully down the runners, plunge into the pots, and get wheeled to the open hearth. There they would tilt it into the fiery hearths, refine it, pour it, roll it, fabricate it. Soon the last shipment would go out, headed toward the ancient Adriatic. On schedule, too! Two who could work like demons, two who knew how, had put it through: Sebold and Doan. This very night, in fact, Old Vrag would take the final charge for Krvav pig.

But on this day black tragedy arrived at Susquehanna Steel; and B. L. Sebold never saw a piece of steel for the tremendous structure of his dreams go up. But the raising of this steel was not the climax of Beelzebub's career. The making of it was—the making of such steel that men would dare erect that bridge. That was his triumph. He saw that steel get made.

He did not see, in truth, the last few hundred tons of it completed. But he did see this: he saw the empty skip-hoist bucket waiting for the last charge of ore for Krvav pig. He saw it resting at the bottom of the skip-hoist pit, ready as soon as filled, to climb the steep incline that led to Old Vrag's charging hopper, high aloft. Dan Tankovitch knows that Sebold saw it. So it was fitting that that night should see the closing of all records for Sebold.

THE epic last day of that man! The grisly mystery of his going! The god-like sacrifice he made before he went! A Book says, "Greater love hath no man—" Yet B. L. Sebold laid down something immeasurably more precious to him than his life. B. L. Sebold laid down that day—and knew full well that he was doing it—his sanity!

About the mills, the furnaces, the gas-producers, there lurks a danger threatening worse than death. It is monoxide gas. About the great valve chambers underneath the open hearth charging-

floor, back in still pockets below the coal-bins of the gas makers, down in the dripping chambers below the huge gas washers, you may smell the taint that often goes with odorless monoxide in a steel plant. Leakage—and deadly danger.

B. L. Sebold had been warned. Three times he had been gassed. Twice is enough for most men. Old Doctor Black told me about the dreadful consequences of monoxide poisoning.

Black is the white-haired company surgeon at Susquehanna Steel. There is a man! Seventy, if he's a day, but he serves; and because he knows he serves, he looks you in the eye and tells you where you had best head in.

"See here, Sebold," he warned: "You think that brain of yours is proof against abuse. Well, maybe it can stand up under any amount of work; but you get one more proper dose of gas, and you'll be out where everybody thinks he is Napoleon. And don't sit there and scoff, Sebold. I mean this!"

Sebold had been crawling on hands and knees, with Doan on his back, when the monoxide got him.

Last time I talked with Doctor Black, I asked about monoxide. I had often heard about it at the plant—stories of men sent to insane asylums by it; but I had never known an actual case. I had thought it just a sort of steel-mill legend.

"Legend!" exploded Doctor Black, when I suggested this. "Monoxide?"

THEN he went on to tell me.

"Monoxide is a frightful poison; active, not inert like dioxide. Dioxide merely drowns you—smothers you. But monoxide rides the blood into the brain. It steals the oxygen from the red corpuscles. It starves the brain of oxygen, with horrible results. If we can bring a man back with first aid after he has been gassed with this abominable stuff, we can rid his body of it pretty quickly, with little ill effect to tissues, organs; but we can't fix up the damage done inside his skull. That repair, luckily, a healthy brain can make itself, most times, provided—and remember this—provided the patient has not been gassed before. But even if the brain wins back to health, there seems a weak spot left, more easily attacked next time. Bad stuff, monoxide!"

And Doctor Black, who handles the ghastly jobs the mills occasionally send in to him with fewer qualms, it seems, than you would feel in tying a bandage on a little girl's cut finger, shuddered.

"But," I reminded Doctor Black, "the old mill-hands used to say that Sebold shook off gas the way a dog shakes off water. Wasn't that a fact?"

"He got four shots I know about," said Black. "Twice he threw off the effects completely. I've never seen so tough a man—so marvelously strong a brain. No wonder he rose to the heights he did in steel, a business where the mental wear and tear is fearful. But the third time came an ugly sign. His physical recovery, as usual, was unbelievably swift. But I kept careful check on him, and found out that his memory for recent things was bad for weeks. Five or ten minutes after something happened, his memory might lose it utterly—to pick it up an hour afterward with perfect clarity. He threw this off too, in a little while, and laughed about it when I said how ominous it was. It was a deadly sign. I told him so. I said: 'See here, B.L.! You take just one more out with gas, and it's curtains for that thing you do your thinking with. One more! I'm telling you—I can't be too emphatic. You get another knockout with monoxide, and you're a damned sight worse than dead!'

"I told him that," Doctor Black said to me, telling me about the ghastly stuff.

And so I think about that sentence in the Book: "Greater love hath no man—" And I wonder.

Upon the day when Old Vrag started in to melt the last half-thousand tons of pig iron that went into Krvav steel, bricklayers were lining a new gas-flue which hooked up old gas-makers then in operation with a battery of new producers which had just been built. And three of these bricklayers, working far back in the new flue, failed to crawl out when it was time to spell them off.

A man crept in to them, and in a little while, close to collapse, crept out again, laboriously dragging after him a body, limp and greenly pale. The temporary brick bulkhead, built at the end of the active old flue, to shut it off from the new one while the men were working in it, was leaking, so the rescuer reported. The other two men, overcome, lay back there where they had fallen, not far from the bulkhead.

Another volunteer crawled in. On the way out, he got within ten feet of the open flue end, and there sprawled forward. They dragged him out, unconscious, together with the second man, whom he had pulled along until he dropped.

But by now the sickening sweet smell that accompanied the filthy gas had reached the open flue-end, tainting the outside air. And yet a third man filled his chest half a dozen times, tied a handkerchief across his face, and dared the gaining gas, to get the third bricklayer out before it was too late.

This man did not come out.

Then men would no longer let each other go into that tube of death—or worse. But while first aid went on with rescuers and rescued, and while all waited in a terrible despair for the ambulance to come with miners' rescue-helmets, tanks of reviving gas, and Doctor Black, Sebold came on the scene.

HE knew at once. He knew steel, did Beelzebub; he had seen men standing about like that before—standing idly, helplessly, faces drawn with fear, waiting, just waiting, while a sweetness far more horrible than the vapors of a charnel house befouled the air.

"Last rescuer still in there?" Sebold asked. He knew steel men, did Sebold. He knew they'd keep on going in until—

They told him, yes.

He walked up to the flue end, put his head in, took a little breath.

"Nothing to do," he stated. "No use to waste another life. Has everything been done? Tanks, helmets, doctor com-

ing? Where's Doan? He'd see to everything. Where's Doan?"

They told him where Doan was.

AND then they tried to keep Sebold from going in that flue. With Doan in there, they tried to keep him out—Beelzebub, a raging, fighting devil, who weighed two-five, all rawhide, bone and fierce determination. They tried to stop him—when he loved Jelena Petrovitch, and knew that Jelena Petrovitch loved Jimmy Doan. "You give to one you love," he had been told. Six men laid hold of him. The last man, hanging to his foot as Sebold crawled into that flue, flew backwards as though hurled by blasting powder.

Then time crawled. . . . Seconds dragged by. . . . Minutes, maybe. No man could tell. It seemed like hours to the white-faced men who waited. Hours it seemed, in which the only thing which came out of the shadowy circle of that flue-end was a vile, appalling sweetness. If B. L. Sebold could not come out of that pipe, nobody could. And so they waited, until there came a clanging of the ambulance's gong.

I think that no man ever lived who gloried in his brain as Sebold did; a keen, unbreakable, dynamic brain. It fought for him; it dreamed and worked for him. No problem could dismay it, no load crack it. I think no man so thoroughly despised a mental weakling. And I am sure that no man ever dreaded death with half—a tenth—the dread with which this mental giant dreaded the maiming of that mystic, godlike essence which functioned in his great case-hardened skull. . . .

A man in a miner's helmet brought B. L. Sebold out. He found him face down, Doan on top of him. He had been crawling on hands and knees, with Doan on his back, when the monoxide got him. There was a ghastly greenish pallor on his face. There were small bright red spots of color on his cheeks. His lower lip was deeper scarlet than the upper one. Sebold had gotten one more proper knockout with monoxide.

They brought out Jimmy Doan and the third bricklayer. This was Jimmy Doan's first dose of gas. Jimmy would throw it off. They used first aid on him, and on Sebold. Doctor Black knew that first aid was useless for the third bricklayer; he had been near that leaking bulkhead much too long, and he would never take a breath of air again. But Doctor Black looked with more pity on the face of B. L. Sebold than he did on the face of that one who was dead. . . .

That night Beelzebub rose from his bed, choked the attendant with him, tied him to a chair, and stuffed the corner of a sheet into his mouth. Then Sebold dressed. Old Pero Pokopats, the watchman at the main gate of the plant, saw him go through at one o'clock in the morning. Of course the watchman made no question—no report to anyone. There was nothing strange in Sebold going into the plant at any hour of the twenty-four. Beelzebub walked past old Pero Pokopats—into oblivion.

A searching-party made up of old-timers at the Ironville works, men who knew every dank and steamy hot-well, every valve-chamber cellar, every reeking sewer, every dark hole into which a body might fall or be tumbled, searched the plant for weeks.

But they never found him.

Foul play, said everyone. But there was no foul play. Two knew it—big Dan Tankovitch and Stari Vrag, whose other name was Blast Furnace No. 4. And suddenly, one day, I too knew that there had been no foul play. A week ago, visiting Susquehanna Steel, talking of old days with Dan Tankovitch, standing with Dan, watching a heat get tapped, listening to that infernal little river as it flowed by, whispering dreadful things, I felt chill striking through me in spite of that skin-drying heat. I knew!

There, talking with me, was Dan Tankovitch, Beelzebub's brother-craftsman, a sort of brother-devil in this world of fiery wind and molten rain; maybe Beelzebub's friend, even. And towering above us, old Vrag, the blast furnace that had made every pound of the pig-iron that got changed to steel for Krvav bridge—her bridge. Where would he go—Beelzebub, with his hour drawing nigh?

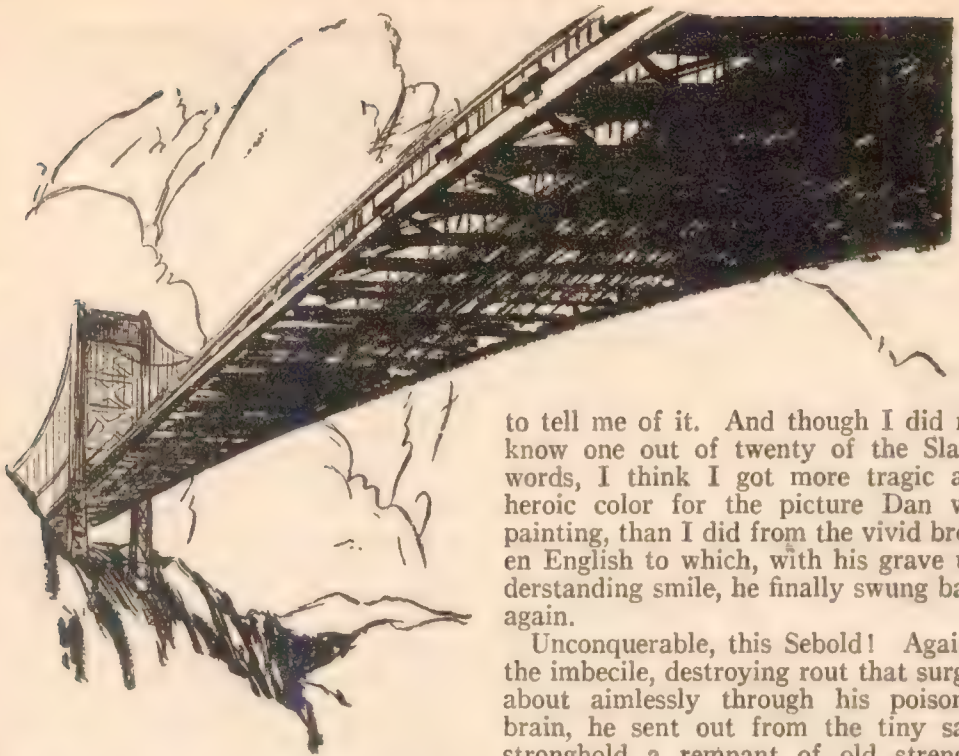
SO I said in the old mill idiom to Dan: "Dan, tell me: Which place gone *veliki* boss—the big boss, Sebold?"

Sebold had come to the furnace that last night.

Dan had seen him—talked to him.

Dan met him down beneath the ore-bins, down by the skip-pit, down where the huge charging bucket gets its load to carry far up to the furnace top.

Dan had gone down beneath the bins to watch the very last charge of the Krvav order start its steep climb toward the morning stars.



Somehow, by some great miracle of fighting strength, that mighty poisoned brain of Sebold's had won back to a lucid interval. And in it he had gone directly to the giant stacks where he had pitted, many a time before, the strength of him against terrific odds. But as he went to them, he must have felt inside his skull that dreadful tottering for the final crash from which he knew there never could be any fighting up again. So he had hurried, keeping off a foe a thousand times more hideous than death, down to the edge of the deep skip-hoist pit at Number Four. It was to Number Four he went—to Stari Vrag, the stack that had been melting stuff for Krvav bridge, the bridge which Jelena Petrovitch had dreamed, the Titan's task into which, because a woman wished it done, Beelzebub had been throwing all his strength, brain and heart.

DOWN by the skip-hoist pit below the ore-bins serving Number Four he met Dan Tankovitch. He smiled at Dan. Back some place in his brain a little stronghold stood; and from it sallied forth the forces of his sanity. A fighting man all his days, he fought there now before Dan Tankovitch a fight so bitter, so heroic, that the giant Montenegrin, sprung from a war breed probably unmatched in history, swung all unconsciously into his native tongue, trying to tell me of it. And though I did not know one out of twenty of the Slavic words, I think I got more tragic and heroic color for the picture Dan was painting, than I did from the vivid broken English to which, with his grave understanding smile, he finally swung back again.

Unconquerable, this Sebold! Against the imbecile, destroying rout that surged about aimlessly through his poisoned brain, he sent out from the tiny sane stronghold a remnant of old strength that for a moment beat back overwhelming forces.

"Tankovitch!" Sebold said.

"*Gospodar!*" answered old Tankovitch Danilo. The word may be translated, *boss.* But it means also, *lord,* superior; and it was always used by Montenegrins when they addressed their king.

"I am very sick here, Tankovitch," said Sebold, running his fingers through his hair. "I must go far away to be cured. Very far. Do you understand?"

Dan told him that he understood.

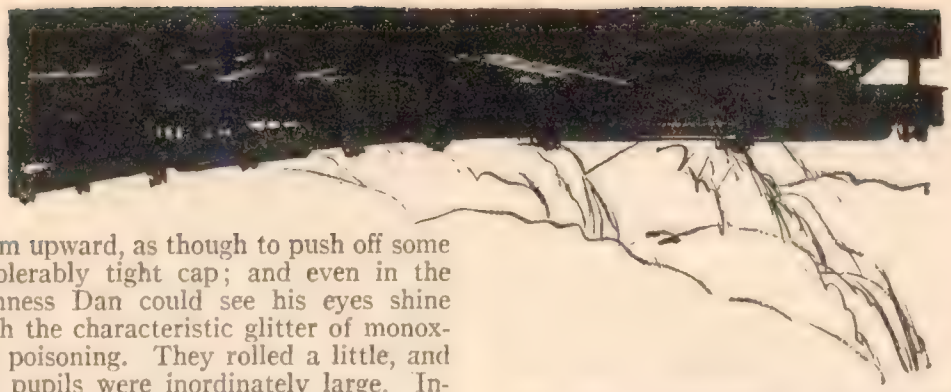
"Good, Tankovitch," Sebold said. "I felt sure that you would. You still are making pig-iron for Krvav?"

"Jus' finish now," said Dan. "Last charge, she's soon come here in hopper-car, get dump in skip-hoist bocket, down below in skip-pit. Pretty soon gon' op dot skip incline, dot last charge. Dot's den be finish Krvav charge in Vrag."

"That's good," said Sebold. "I can go then, to get well. . . . Far, Dan. You understand. I'll leave you get the last few heats through No. 4. The last few heats for Krvav, Dan. You'll make them good—all *dobro*—just as if I was with you, eh?"

"Last heats," Dan promised, "I make *dobro.* Jus' like all every heats before, I make him."

Sebold put up his two hands to his ears, and pressing his finger-tips to his scalp with every item of his strength, ran



them upward, as though to push off some intolerably tight cap; and even in the dimness Dan could see his eyes shine with the characteristic glitter of monoxide poisoning. They rolled a little, and the pupils were inordinately large. Inside his skull that little normal force was being beaten back into its last stronghold.

"Dan," said Beelzebub, "you and I have fought out many a good fight here together—that is so?"

"Good fights t'geder," answered Dan. "Many."

"Remember, Tankovitch, the last one? A half-night battle with a frozen tap-hole?"

"Sure," Dan replied. "Remember dot. Good fight, dot time."

"Remember how we sat and talked together after we got it open? Till dawn, almost, we sat and smoked and rested, talking. Do you remember what you told me about, that night, Dan?"

Dan remembered.

Dan had told that night about old days of war in Montenegro. He had told about the grim and ancient oath between Montenegrin braves—the oath that never a brother, wounded to the death, should be taken by a fiendish enemy. Such a one had but to offer his neck to the keen *hand-jar* of some comrade, passing in swift retirement to stronger heights. It was a right which could be demanded by any stricken brave—the honor of death by a Montenegrin hand.

Tankovitch Danilo looked at B. L. Sebold. That tall old savage warrior had never looked upon a braver man; nor in his years of terrible campaigning had he ever seen a man so direfully wounded. And never had he seen such fiendish enemies as now were swarming in upon this stricken man. But he would not be conquered. He would not go down before that gibbering, delirious assault, though it stormed now at his last defense. But that defense—that last defense was utterly impregnable. That Sebold knew, and knowing it, he brought his shoulders back, straightened a mouth that had begun to sag, drove by sheer will the glitter from his eye.

"*S Bogom,*" Sebold said. "That's right for, 'Good-by' in your talk, isn't it, Dan?"

"Dot's right, my talk," said Dan; and he took the hand which was extended to him—and felt against his palm the flat cold feel of steel.

THEY stood there in the dimness underneath the ore-bins, looking at each other, those tremendous men. Tremendous friendship, such as few men know, existed there. A friendship vast and unexpressed, such as a man might call upon, expecting some grim deed of courage that would help him in a dire hour—and not expecting that grim deed in vain.

There, at the edge of Old Vrag's skip-hoist pit, stood B. L. Sebold, comrade of Tankovitch Danilo, asking what was his right to ask. The wound he had was far more terrible than any death-wound. He put his hand up to his head and said again:

"I am sick here, Tankovitch. Very sick. It is the gas. Fourth time, the gas. You understand about the gas."

Dan Tankovitch was a blast-furnace man. He knew about the gas.

Far down the corridor beneath the ore-bins, Dan heard the rumbling of the hopper-car, coming toward the skip. He looked toward it. Only for a second. But when he turned his eyes again to Sebold, standing at the skip-pit's edge, it seemed not Sebold whom he saw.

Those shoulders were not Sebold's. And that face—

Tankovitch raised his left hand in the ancient last salute of a Montenegrin soldier to a stricken comrade. In his right hand there was now no keen-edged *hand-jar,* but instead, the flat cold little thing of steel that Sebold had put into it.

"*S Bogom*—go with God," said Tankovitch Danilo.

Dan Tankovitch, telling me about the night when Sebold vanished tracelessly, forever, paused. There came a little stretch of silence, in which he looked me straightly in the eye.

"So," said Big Dan very simply, "so I say good-by dot time to *veliki* boss—big boss Sebold; and me, I'm never see dot no more again. Dot's be too much no good for me. Dot big boss, Sebold, he's be friend for me!"

I looked back into the eyes of Tankovitch Danilo, and I couldn't bring myself to ask the question in my mind. But Big Dan saw it in my face.

"Better you ask Old Vrag," said Big Dan, smiling gravely. "He's be best fellow to tell vitch place gone *veliki* boss."

But I did get Dan to tell me how the last charge for Krvav bridge went up for Vrag.

Down the dim corridor beneath the stock-bins the hopper-car came rumbling with that final load, its single incandescent lamp making black column shadows rush and leap. It stopped before the skip-hoist that served Stari Vrag. Below, deep in its pit, lay Old Vrag's yawning charging-bucket. But the little lamp on the hopper-car could not chase out the shadows that lay so darkly in the waiting bucket.

"WELL, Dan," remarked the operator of the hopper-car, "here's the last charge for that big bridge that goes up in your country. Feenish, eh, Dan?"

Dan Tankovitch did not answer right away.

The operator pulled a lever, and tons of ore cascaded from his car down into the inky shadows of the skip-hoist bucket. When the last of the blood-red grains had ceased to fall, Dan answered him.

"Sure," said Dan Tankovitch. "Feenish!"

The operator moved a handle, and his car went rumbling down the corridor to get a load of coke. As he passed a column next to the skip-hoist pit, he reached a hand to it and touched a button; and the skip-hoist motor whined as it picked up its load. Then the huge bucketful of ore started its steep climb toward Vrag's charging rig.

DAN watched, saw it pick up speed, saw it slow down as it approached the top—a marvel of automatic electrical control. He saw the bucket tip. Its charge, the last for Krvav, was started on its long heroic journey. Through Vrag's volcanic stack, through great hearths swept with billowing flame, through thundering rolling mills and volleying shops, by cranes and trains and mighty lifts and ships, to Krvav's chasm in the far Balkan.

There it would finally arrive, a great bridge-member. There it would finally get raised, get swung out dizzily into place, making complete the fabulous leap of steel which had been dreamed by Jelena Petrovitch—by Helen Doan, the woman Sebold had so greatly loved. . . .

Steel takes the chasm of the Krvav in a single leap. Steel men go half across the world to look at it. They look at it, and knowing what a job like that can take out of a man, they wonder how much of Beelzebub is in it. Dan Tankovitch says that only Stari Vrag knows just how much—Old Vrag, that fire-boweled huge goblin who is No. 4 Blast Furnace at Susquehanna Steel.

Standing with big Dan Tankovitch beneath Vrag's bustle-pipe a week ago, visiting Dan and Susquehanna Steel, I heard a shuddery sound. It was the hard, inhuman clacking of the solenoid controls that automatically operate Old Vrag's skip-bucket. That bucket with its tons of rations all measured out for Vrag's insatiable gullet, was making one more of its never-ceasing climbs toward the furnace top rig—the self-same bucket which had carried up for Vrag the last hoist-load for Krvav pig. The merciless cold clacking of those solenoids sent a shiver through me; and I found myself asking mentally of Vrag: "How much? How much?"

And suddenly Old Vrag let go in answer a wild unearthly scream!

One set of stoves that heated Old Vrag's breath a blazing red was growing cold, and the stove-tender now was changing blast. There is no sound in all the world just like the eldritch yelling of the blast as it tears free the fraction of a minute in this operation. I felt ice on my spine.

"What does he say?" I asked Big Dan, who knows blast-furnace language.

"She's say, dot Vrag"—Dan almost whispered it,—"she's say, *'Umobolan! Umobolan!'* Dot Vrag, she's say, 'Vot strong man vant to live *umobolan?*' "

A good word, as the dire words of Slavic always are. *Um-obolan*—mind-sick; we have no word just like it.

So Old Vrag told me what I here put down about the end of B. L. Sebold. So Old Vrag told me—through a very wise interpreter, a giant of a man, whose eyes, a flinty gray, have often looked unwavering at death, but whose strong mouth is also merciful and kind.

Jimmy Doan, standing, gazing at Krvav's terrific span, and the woman at his side who dreamed that beautiful vast dream, had never heard what Old Vrag told to me. Yet they know better than Old Vrag himself how much of B. L. Sebold went into that daring steel. All of Sebold is there. Into that soaring fabric which the woman of his love had set her heart upon, Sebold had put his whole tremendous self. All of that ruthless fighter rests there in that awe-inspiring monument to peace; all of him, battle and sweat and dreams, spirit and gristle and bone—including heart, if he had one. Which is a thing best known by Jelena Petrovitch and her man.

IT is the honeymoon of Jimmy Doan. Ten years after his wedding-day Jimmy Doan and the woman who is still his bride are spending that fragrant month of love and leisure in Jelena Petrovitch's beautiful native land. A line of lovely small stone cabins strings itself, now, along the brink of Krvav, Grand Cañon of the Balkan—with its mighty bridge, a show-place of the new republic and the world. The Balkan stars are close. The mountain air is wine. And on the porch of one small cabin stands tall Jelena Petrovitch, distractingly arrayed for night, her husband's arm across her exquisite shoulders. She watches with shining eyes the lights that show where people come and go across the Krvav bridge. For hours she stands and watches.

People who on the separating battlements of Krvav had hated each other, savagely, many years, now speed with ease, each into the other's land; to mingle there and lose distrust, to understand, to trade, to fall in love and intermarry. The lofty towers of the bridge lift the eye upward, like cathedral spires. Since Krvav chasm has been conquered, there has not been the rumor of a war.

"There it stands," said Jimmy Doan. He tightened his arm about the graceful shoulders, and turned the woman to him. "But first it had to live in this sweet source of dreams." He cupped in his two hands the shapely head, and drew the woman's face toward his. "No one but Jelena Petrovitch would have dared to dream it."

"But it took you," she said, "and men who know the kind of man you are, to build it."

SO near her face was, that her lips brushed his in speaking. So for a moment Jimmy could not talk. But when he lifted his head, he said:

"No one but B. L. Sebold would have dared to build it."

"He brought you back to me out of a place more fearful than the Valley of Death. . . . Then vanished." She gazed a long, long time across her husband's shoulder at the bridge. "It is for him a —give me the English, Jimmy—cenotaph?"

"No, not quite, *draga,*" Jimmy told her. "A cenotaph is empty. The one it honors always lies elsewhere."

She pressed up closer to him, then, as though afraid a little.

"Jimmy," she whispered then, "he is there?"

"The real remains of any man, I think," said Jimmy Doan, "are the things he dared to do."

A long, long while she gazed again, her soft warm body pressed to her husband's. The towers of the great bridge touched the stars. Its long span crossed the night.

"It is the most magnificent memorial ever built to any man," she breathed.

"It is the most magnificent memorial ever built," said Jimmy Doan, "to a man's love for a woman." He looked down very deeply into the wide-apart gray eyes. "No woman but Jelena Petrovitch," he added gently, "could have been so beloved."

Thick fragrant strands of tumbled blue-black hair were part of her, alive, between his fingers.

"After ten years," he said, "I can't believe that such a woman really is my own."

The steady gray eyes warmed with golden lights.

"On my honeymoon," said Jimmy Doan's woman, offering her lips, "I am confident I can convince you!"

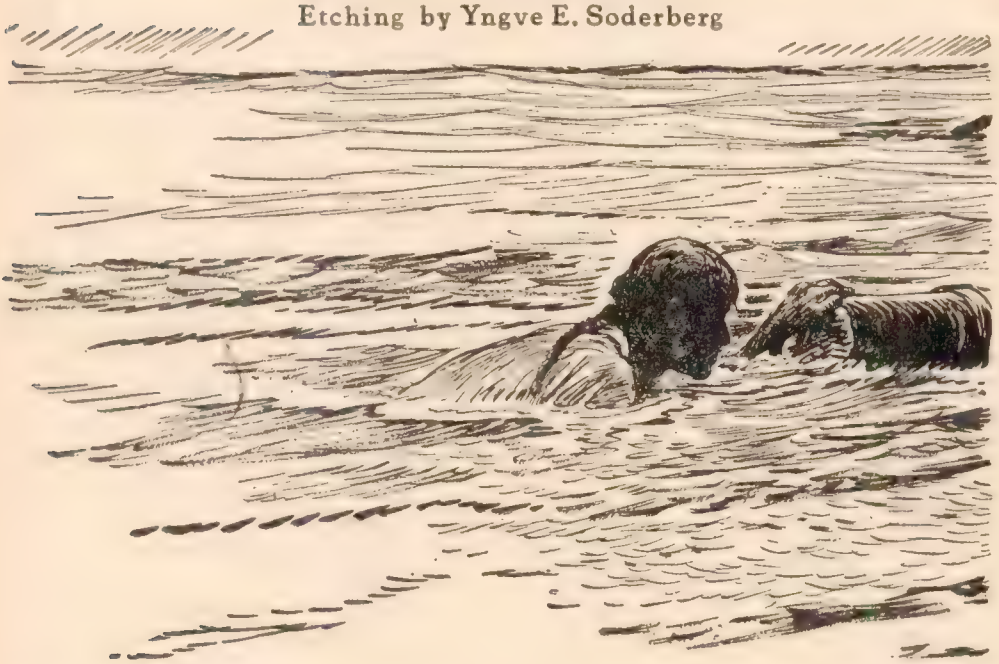
THE END

Thirteen Men

This twenty-fourth story in the famous "Arms and Men" series describes the contriving of the first torpedo—and presents a very moving drama.

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Drawings by Jeremy Cannon
Etching by Yngve E. Soderberg



WHEN the fleet is in, Coronado is a lively place, for the home half of the Navy hangs out there, with some of the Army to boot. As you may know, the Navy ashore is divided into two parts—that which boasts happy home life, and that which cruises, as it were. Coronado inclines to the former and more formal half. . . .

On this afternoon at the cocktail hour the club bar was full, and I wandered into a hot argument in one corner. I counted an admiral, a flight commander, a San Diego lawyer with too many rum swizzles under his belt, a commander and one or two more. Beside the Admiral was the visiting French consul.

"Damn the torpedoes!" Farragut or somebody had said. And the quotation started the argument here. Where had torpedoes come from, anyhow?

"It's a well-known fact," said the Admiral, "that Robert Fulton invented the torpedo. He experimented with it for Napoleon, in 1805, but failed to convince him."

"Applesauce!" sang out the San Diego lawyer most irreverently. "Where'd he get it? Stole it the way he did the steamboat! His theft is a matter of court record."

The Admiral chose to ignore the fellow.

"Torpedoes were not new then," put in the Flight Commander. "They had been used earlier—even back in Revolutionary days."

"Those contraptions were all floating mines," the Commander declared positively. "A torpedo is a thing that moves, that can be aimed and fired. Torpedoes didn't exist until propelling mechanism

and exploding caps were invented, and electricity."

"But perhaps they did," put in the French Consul apologetically. "I am able to inform you on the subject, gentlemen. It is, however, something of a story."

"Boy!" barked the Admiral. "Put that Demarara bottle on the table, get some more ice and limes!"

The French Consul, to whom our 1913 Demarara was a joyous novelty, beamed through his whiskers and fingered his stick. It was a handsome thing of red wood like teak, with silver mountings. As sticks in California belong only to the diplomatic corps, unhealthily retired millionaires, and actors, it determined his status at once.

"This," he said gently, "came from Madagascar. I was stationed there in my early days, and myself dug this up from the coral reef of Douglass. This, as you no doubt know, is a bare little devilish clump of coral off the island, in the Mozambique Channel."

"Excuse me," said the San Diego lawyer. "You say you dug that stick up from a coral reef? Do coral reefs grow silver-mounted sticks?"

The French Consul, who like others of his race lacked spontaneous humor, blinked.

"I did not make myself clear," he explained. "An East Indiaman had once been wrecked on the reef, which was named for her. I procured the stick from her timbers of red teak. The islet itself is only half a mile long, of jagged coral not thirty feet above the water at the highest part, and bare except for pandanus scrub and brush. No water there, of course."

"Not even around the island?" asked the San Diego lawyer, wide-eyed. This was a bit too much, and he was promptly squelched. After the glasses were re-

filled all around, the French Consul resumed his story.

"On the westward or channel side of the island is a landing. The water there is deep close up, but an infernal race of currents exists, because of the submerged reefs on the south and east of the islet, which perpetually shoot forth currents —very definite currents that sweep around the islet to the west or deep side. And now you must see the *Douglass* wrecked there, if you are to understand my discoveries."

ONE never knows when a miracle will take place, these days. Here was a pedantic Frenchman in spats and whiskers, precise of speech, fluent of English, a bit of a scientist. Then the Demarara got in its work—and *presto, changeo!*

He became a man voluble, an artist with words and gestures, forgetting himself and in his rapt wizardry transporting us to tropic seas and distant days, days when that lordly East Indiaman came rolling down the Mozambique Channel homeward bound, in all the glory of her sixty-odd sails full set and drawing—moon-rakers, star-gazers, ringtail and water-sail, mizzen-royal staysail and all the others forgotten of men in these degenerate days.

Rolling down with the unswerving monsoon, but holding to no course. Staggering now toward the islet, puffs of smoke spurting from her deck, men fighting there, flash of steel in the sunlight. Then scream upon scream reechoing as her coppered teak touched the coral, as her lofty spars shook and swayed and crashed, as canvas veiled her deck from sight. All in the bright daylight, gone to wreck and ruin without even a sea running or a squall sweeping down from the blue Madagascar peaks breaking the horizon.

So fell the *Douglass,* ripping copper and teak on the sharp coral as she reeled and scraped across the outer reefs, coming to rest at length. A boat, and another, that put off from her sides, an officer shaking his fist in frenetic fury at those left behind, a musket spurting response at him. Two crowded boats, long oars out, pulling for the Madagascar shore; and the wreckage here in the sunset, with the maudlin yells and songs of drunken mutineers echoing from the hulk, and corpses washing in the shallows alongside, to vanish in the night.

But one man, beneath the blazing Southern Cross, was not drunk.

A vivid, eager man, scars of manacles on arm and naked ankle, moving about the hulk that night with bobbing lantern, working like mad—smashing in butts of wine and rum while snores droned up around him, sending streams of liquor into the sea and into the bilge, until at length he dropped exhausted in the plundered captain's cabin.

Then came the daylight again, and the man, his blue eyes ablaze, his hair blowing like spun metal, pistols girt to his waist.

He grimly eyed the others as they wakened to their plight, staggering amid the wreckage in search of liquor, and finding scant quantity. Two "Manila men," Portuguese breeds from Goa; six former French prisoners; four hangdog ruffians who, like himself, had been homeward bound in chains and were now ravening wolves let loose. Thirteen in all, utterly dominated by his own flaming energy, his intelligence, his ability to command. He had no rival. They were content to obey him now, as they had done in mutiny, in escape, in mad onset upon their captors.

"You yourselves dumped the liquor. Have ye forgot your drunken madness last night?" he told them craftily. "Two boats got away. We've others left, but broken by falling spars. Only one will swim, the little gig. We'll have to work on the others, for we'll need two with our loot and selves."

"And others i' the convoy will be booming along," spoke up a sullen seaman. "This wreck stands high out o' water, Master Carruthers; we'll be sighted, sure. We must make shift to get away."

"Aye? And how?" said Carruthers. "There's hanging for all of us if caught."

"And for you, anyhow," spoke up another. "It was you killed that rascally Bombay lawyer in duel, and they clapped you in quod for murder. Yet it was fair fight."

"So it was," said Carruthers coolly. "Yet the man had powerful friends, and I was but a junior officer, and fit sacrifice. Well, enough o' that! All hands, talk it over. If you stick with me, you take my orders, or elect another as captain. Which?"

THE discussion was short. One of the Frenchmen was an officer, Duhamel by name; a frank, pleasant man of good blood. He gave the French vote for Carruthers instantly, and the others assented. Then cabin stores were broken out,

In the bright daylight, gone to wreck and ruin, without even a sea running!

and as the thirteen men ate, Carruthers canvassed their situation.

"Duhamel, take six men in the gig and get to the island yonder; we must know if there's fresh water there," he said. "The rest of us will clear away the deck and get to work patching up a large boat. We must get food and loot ashore, powder and muskets, a couple of these twelve-pounders and shot."

"Guns?" spoke up a man.

"Aye. We'll not be caught without using our teeth!" said Carruthers; and they all growled assent. "The first blow to come up will lift the *Douglass* off the coral and sink her in the lagoon. We

Puffs of smoke spurting from her

must break out everything we need and get it ashore—work night and day to do it! Then we can repair two of the boats at leisure. Must make a good job of it. Remember, the captain and two boats got away—and if they're picked up by any of the convoy, they'll bring sure and certain peril on us! We have canvas, spars in plenty, everything we can use, and plunder to make us all rich if we do get away. So fall to!"

EXCEPT the Frenchmen, these men were arrant rogues.

One had been condemned to years of hell for filching a bit of decent food from cabin stores; two of them were murderers, like Carruthers, who had resented oppression and insult; another had struck his superior and had been charged with mutiny.

For John Company ruled with an iron hand in India; the Company ships were men-of-war no less than traders, and discipline meant tyranny as it was too often administered. Small wonder that all these men fell to work like demons, with the prospect ahead of freedom, of a new horizon, and the hell of injustice and dread oppression behind them.

For Carruthers himself, the past was sealed beyond hope. He was a gentleman, now broken and done for. His brother was in the Company service, somewhere aboard this same homeward-bound convoy, an officer; but a poor man and without influence. Mary Cambridge, whom he loved, was aboard this same convoy, somewhere. She was gone out of his life forever, had believed the false charges against him, had cast him aside definitely. He could look back at a broken life and curse it—but he could also plan another ahead.

deck; men fighting; flash of steel!

So they worked, all of them, slaved at the tasks he set them, and he labored with them and more than any two of them together. Order gradually came out of chaos aboard the hulk. One boat was hastily patched, enough to take shore trips.

Duhamel reported that there was no water on the islet, which meant that butts must be carried ashore; there was plenty and to spare of fresh water aboard the wreck.

Shears were rigged. First came necessities, afterward came loot. Two twelve-pounders were sent over and taken ashore; powder and shot and muskets, spars and timbers. Two of the broken boats, with tools and provisions and water. Some fowl, a couple of sheep, and two pigs remained in the pens aboard, and these were loosed ashore.

The day passed. Carruthers drove them on into the night, until they fell in utter exhaustion. With morning, he pointed to the rising sea, the threat of wind in the sky; it was enough. Leaving Duhamel in charge, he went ashore with the two Manila men, who were cheerful devils, to inspect the island. He himself was in mortal terror of another ship of the fleet coming upon them, for there would be no mercy.

THERE were two landings, he found —one through the reefs, one on the west side, where the water was deep but ran like a millrace. This one, any ship would choose perforce. He got the two cannon placed to command the shore and water, and then could rest easy. It would require a week of labor, he figured, to make the two boats seaworthy.

On the horizon, the Madagascar peaks loomed blue and hospitable, for here

were kindly natives, here the old haunt of buccaneers—but the two boats would have to carry much.

A sudden squall of sheet-lightning, rain, wind, broke upon them that day. The lightning, by the peculiar conditions of the Mozambique channel, was everywhere. It filled the air, the sky and the sea-surface.

The wreck still held, but any sweeping seas would topple her if they came. All hands were in desperate fear now for their plunder, and labored incessantly getting the richest of it ashore—the specie, the silks and the loot of India garnered for English admiration.

And with the sunset, a speck of white topsails was seen to the north.

NEXT morning came heavier seas, so that they worked frantically; came too a larger speck of canvas in the north. This grew and grew. By mid-afternoon Carruthers knew that a ship was quartering the seas, now nearer, now farther. All knew it. Their loot was ashore, and when the hulk reeled and rocked, they too went ashore, to form camp there and take chances with destiny. . . .

The second morning found the great hulk swept into deeper water, only her carven stern sticking high out; and against the horizon hung that ominous sail.

"The hulk will betray us, if any ship comes close," said Duhamel. "Blow her up!"

"Not now." And Carruthers pointed to the sail. "The explosion would be seen; the smoke would bring them down upon us. Meantime, get ready while we await a clear chance."

They labored at the guns, at the camp, getting everything in shape, falling to work at last upon the two boats. A day and another passed; and still the white canvas grew large and lessened again, quartering about, definitely seeking the low reefs. She must have picked up one or both of those two boats. Carruthers was certain of it by her persistency.

"There's the rope awaiting us, my bullies," he said grimly. "If she sights the island, then you swing—or fight."

One of the men questioned, white-faced:

"But how can we fight her cannon, her crew and passengers?"

"By obeying me, my lad," said Carruthers. And such was his flame of energy, his kindling vigor, his élan and dash, that they believed him.

Carruthers was not still for a moment. When the most imperative needs were met, he wandered by the water, or went out in the gig with two men at the oars, testing the reefs and channels, floating bits of wood in the currents to estimate speed and direction. If worse came to worst, if these thirteen men were brought to bay and forced to fight for life and liberty against overwhelming odds, not force would save them, he knew well, but quick wits and knowledge of detail.

And still the scrap of sail hung ominous and persistent, now to the north, now to the west, now circling from east to south again and back.

"There's thirteen of us, Cap'n," said one of the Englishmen, as they sat eating under the stars, a tiny fire of wreckage flickering beside them. "And thirteen at table—"

"Be damned to it," Carruthers laughed. He had finished his meal, and by the firelight was working over a section of the wreck's mizzen. "If they find us, lads, it's thirteen of us swung to a yardarm, mind that! Eh, Duhamel?"

The Frenchman, who like his fellows understood and spoke English fairly well, showed white teeth in a flashing smile, and stretched an arm for an ember to light his pipe.

"Right!" he said cheerfully. "What ees it you make zere, *mon capitaine?*"

"A toy," said Carruthers. "A toy to play the devil's game, if need be."

He would say no more, but worked in silence, fitting an absurd little mast and a scrap of sail to one end of the great thick spar.

CAME morning; one of the Manila men ascended the topmost pinnacle of coral, then came running and leaping back to the camp, his brown face pasty.

"The ship—heading for us!" he gasped. "And another with her!"

It was true, ghastly true. With a spy-glass, Carruthers examined the two sail. The one, a lordly East Indiaman, mighty spread of canvas billowing; the other a smaller craft. A corvette, said one of the seamen, probably a corvette of war.

"They've got us," Carruthers said simply. "But the wind's bad for 'em. They'll not tack down on us much before night, cruise about, and anchor in the morning. Time enough."

"Time enough—for what?" cried one of the men in panic. "We'll have one o' they boats done today; can we slip away to Madagascar, then?"

"Not likely," said Carruthers, and went back to his toy.

The ten-foot section of mast was in the water now, with a round-shot slung on the under-side for balance; and with her bow end rudely pointed, she swam well enough. A long musket, a Brown Bess, was wired firmly to her upper part. Now Carruthers placed weights upon her until he found how much of a weight she would carry and still keep the musket out of water; whereat he fell to work at the lagoon.

With one man on lookout, the others hid themselves, spread bits of brush over the two cannon, laid canvas over all else. There was still the chance that the two sail would merely give the island a look, and go their way if no sign of life appeared.

But since the stern of the wreck still hung high out of the water, Carruthers knew the chance was a slender one.

ALL that day the great ship tacked down, ever closer, nearer, the smaller corvette keeping her company like a faithful hound. And all that day Carruthers worked over his toy, until with the coming of sunset he laid it aside with a sigh of relief and assurance. Now, under the muzzle of the musket, which was mounted on the spar, there was fastened securely in place an iron canister, taken from the hulk, stuffed to the vent with powder. And in the bow was a careful tangle of wires and lines.

But sunset showed the two ships bearing down for the island, and then holding off to await morning and more safety in movement.

The thirteen ashore huddled together under the stars and ate cold that night. Some were for putting out in the one repaired boat and running for it, abandoning all else to save life; but this, as Carruthers pointed out, was sheer folly. The wind was dead against them if they were to make Madagascar: and unless they got a far start ere morning, the two ships would run them down.

"So even the wind is against us," Duhamel said moodily. "What then?"

"Fight," said Carruthers, and laughed. "They can land but in the one spot, for they'll not dare send in boats through the reefs on the other side—not yet, anyhow. And if needs must, tomorrow night we may slip away with a change of wind."

The others huddled over their pipes and cursed their fate.

With morning, the suspense was soon brought to an end. The two ships tacked down, circled about, and made for the one anchorage and landing in sight. First came the corvette to feel the way, and three hundred yards out, her chain rattled and her anchor went down. The ship crawled after her, chose a farther anchorage, and moored. The canvas came down, and a boat was lowered from each ship.

"That settles it, my lads." Carruthers turned to his men. "Duhamel, see that the guns are loaded with grape. Double-shot them to make sure. Take the south gun, but don't fire unless I wave my hand. No use in further concealment. Take cover with the muskets, those not in the gun-crew, and stay hid. Load all the muskets and then let them bide."

And as the two boats filled with men and put off, he calmly walked down on the shore where the one landing-spot was located, free of coral and with shelving beach. He held a speaking-trumpet from the wreck, and lifted it as the two boats paused in astonishment at sight of him.

"Ahoy, there!" his voice lifted. "Sheer off! We've a battery planted; if you bear in, we'll open fire."

"You damn' impudent rogue!" A figure stood up in one of the boats, shaking his fist. Carruthers recognized the captain of the *Douglass*. "I'll see you hung at Tyburn for your deviltry! Give way, lads, give way!"

CARRUTHERS bowed very politely, very elaborately, and then waved his hand. With that, he went at a run for his own gun, which was at some distance from the other.

The two boats broke into way, the men bearing on their oars. With a crash and a roar, with a vast billow of smoke, Duhamel's gun went off. The Frenchman had not waited long enough. Bullets tore the water into shreds of foam, struck down a man on the corvette's boat, did no further damage. With a cheer, the two crews bent again to their work and sent the craft for the beach.

They came squarely under the sights of Carruthers' gun, and he set the match to the vent. There was a second roar, a second belch of smoke. From the water came cries and screams of stricken men. The one boat was shredded, sinking; the other badly damaged. Yells of sudden frenzied delight went up from the castaways.

A musket banged out, then another.

Pleskett faced him angrily. "Sir! This is outrageous! Do you

Carruthers leaped up angrily.

"Cover, you fools! Take cover!" he blared. "Load the guns, then in among the rocks, for your lives!"

The East Indiaman was swinging around, her ports falling, to bring her eighteen guns of a side to bear. The damaged boat, picking up survivors, was limping back toward the ships. Trumpets were shrilling, drums rolling.

And then the guns of vengeance began to roar.

Both ships broadside to, their guns spoke deliberately, slowly, steadily, sending a rain of death hurtling upon the island. Round shot, grape, bags of bullets, whistled and smashed among the pandanus scrub, sent coral projections into powder, screamed overhead.

Carruthers, watching from a vantage-point behind a coral screen, saw that the purpose was to batter all life out of the island before the boats went in again. Other boats were in the water now, making ready, but these would be slow in getting off.

The cannonade continued, searching out every portion of the coral rock within reach. The two guns had been reloaded, the men scattered and in shelter. One of them alone suffered from that rain of fire and death, two grape-shot killing him instantly; and he, as it chanced, was that same man who had talked the preceding night about thirteen at table.

Carruthers watched grimly, satisfied that neither of the guns had been struck and dismounted. He had trained those two guns well upon a certain spot in the water; and all one needed to do, was wait until the boats had reached that spot.

When Duhamel joined him, he impressed this fact on the Frenchman.

"Don't fire too quickly next time, or it'll go worse with us," he said. "For next time means make or break. Pass word to the men that they're to open fire on the boats with all the muskets, as soon as both of our guns have fired."

With a word of assent, Duhamel crawled away.

The guns roared on while a steady breeze played on the two ships, whipping out their ensigns so that Carruthers could plainly read and curse the initials of the Company on that of the great ship. *U.E.I.C.*, they read—United East India Company. On her deck, watching the show beneath a sun-awning, were brave uniforms and gay dresses—officers and families homeward bound.

"So we die to make a rare show for you, damn you!" muttered Carruthers as he eyed them. "Wait until night; you'll sing a different tune then, if I'm alive!"

A big *if*, as he well knew; but he had chosen the gamble and would abide by it.

Signals and voices were exchanged between the two ships. The gunfire slowed and died away.

The thin shrill piping of a bo'sun's whistle resounded in the ensuing silence, and the smoke-drift thinned out, to show men going down into the boats—oarsmen, and with them soldiers in uniform, soldiers of the Company. So the corvette was a Company ship too! Carruthers cursed her.

"Ready, Duhamel?" he called, and heard the assent of the Frenchman.

The boats were pulling away now. Again a gun crashed, and grape smashed and whistled in the scrub. Carruthers grinned. He had long since discounted this covering of the landing. There could be no reloading of the two guns this time, however; they must do their work, or all was lost. A reloading crew would catch a broadside and be blown into eternity.

He crept out, keeping low amid the scrub. Duhamel was risking it also, match in hand. If either of them went down, one of the other men would replace him. Only one man was needed to each gun.

A thirty-two roared and shook the air, bags of bullets raking the whole slope above the landing. Duhamel was still going—all well, then! Carruthers approached his own gun, and waited. The boats were pulling in, six of them, crowding together as they must do, because that shelf of beach was a narrow one.

command these rascals?"

Now—it was the time!

Carruthers leaped up. He glimpsed Duhamel appearing likewise. The match sent a powder-spurt from the vent, lost in the roar of the discharge. Duhamel's gun banged out. From the ships, other guns spoke swiftly.

Duhamel was down.

"Vive la République!" his voice lifted thinly in death.

But the boats—the boats! Transfixed, careless of the grape whistling around, Carruthers stared. No mistake this time. That storm of grape had torn them to shreds. Two were under already, two others filling, and the crews of the two remaining boats were desperately pulling in survivors.

From the brush opened muskets, fast as men could pick one up and fire, then pick up another. The two boats were backing under that galling fire, men pitching down, officers dead or dying.

Bodies strewed the beach. Wounded men crawled up and sank helpless. The angry cannon of the two ships vomited fury upon the island brush, as the two hurt and maimed boats, crowded to the gunwales, crawled back out.

In shelter of a coral hummock, Carruthers surveyed his excited little band, who had fallen back to safety from that storm of shot. Three dead in all, two hurt by rock splinters.

"Give me your shirt while your shoulder's bound up," Carruthers said to one of the wounded men. "The rest of you be ready to help those on the beach, if they halt firing."

He took the shirt, walked out into the open, and waved it. A trumpet blew; the firing ceased. Craftily schemed, this, for his own sake as well as in mercy; and Carruthers laughed grimly as he advanced toward the landing. Half a dozen of his men followed, warily enough.

Those aboard ship understood at a glance. Men were crawling ashore, spent with swimming or with wounds. The hurt men were given a hand, the others were told to lift and carry those unable to walk.

"Ah, ye damned dogs! Ye'll hang for this!" sobbed out a helpless, infuriated officer.

Carruthers smiled.

"Not we, my friend. Give your men a hand, or I'll have you triced up and given a lashing. Quick about it! All of you, a hundred yards up the slope, in the brush, where the wounded will be out of the sun. And mind, we have muskets trained on you."

He turned to the two ships. Gayly, ironically, he bowed to them; their guns were spiked now. He had won his gamble —for with their own men in plain sight on the slope, they would risk no more broadsides.

Two of his Frenchmen stood guard over the refugees from the boats. Others came and reloaded the two guns, roars of comprehending fury coming from the ships. Carruthers went to where Duhamel lay dead, touched the pale gray face, then sighed and turned away.

THE morning breeze was puffing out. Noon was approaching. Carruthers, as he joined his own men back in camp, eyed the sky and then turned to them.

"Ten of us left, lads: a boat's-crew," he said. "They'll spend the afternoon scouting the island and the reefs on this side, looking for other landings. Let 'em be unless they come too close, then loose your muskets. And the wind's shifting a bit."

"Then we can slip away tonight, Cap'n?" cried one of the Manila men.

"Maybe," said Carruthers. "First let's see if I can't blow their big ship yonder to hell. If we fail at that, granted; we'll be off with the wind ere midnight. Leave most of the loot, have the boat ready with water and grub and arms. Take only what plunder each man can carry. But if I win my play—then, by the Lord, we'll loot two instead of one!"

A little later one of the prisoners, who could swim, was sent out to the ships with word that any cannonading would only destroy the wounded and captured on the hillside. Sharks? There were none about, said Carruthers truly enough, for none had been seen around the island. So the man went, and was taken aboard safely. And there were no more guns discharged that day.

AS Carruthers had predicted, however, two boats went out and crept around the islet, taking soundings and examining the shores. The Company men had learned caution from their heavy losses. Toward late afternoon Carruthers, who was working over his toy, was summoned by the men on watch. A boat with one passenger and a white flag was coming ashore from the East Indiaman.

He sauntered down to the landing; and in the portly, choleric gentleman recognized Mr. Pleskett, chief surgeon of the Chinsurah Factory, a prominent person in the Indian establishments. Pleskett stamped out of the boat and faced him angrily.

"Sir! This is outrageous! Who the devil may you be? Do you command these rascals?"

Carruthers bowed. "Precisely. Also the situation, I think. Your business?"

"I desire to remove the wounded aboard ship for treatment and—"

"Not so fast. You're welcome to treat 'em here; and here they stay. Also the unwounded."

"Do you realize, you ruffian, that you're facing the gallows?"

Carruthers laughed a little. "Come, come, my dear Pleskett! On the contrary, we've just planted a battery of six more guns to command the landing, and have another battery ready to command the reefs on the other side the island. We're a trifle short-handed, having only thirty-odd men, but enough."

"You recognize me, sir? Who the devil are you? Your name!"

"That is none of your business," said Carruthers. "By the way, you might ask it from the captain of the *Douglass,* who must have recognized me."

"He was killed by your first shot. Damme, sir—"

"If you wish to treat the prisoners, do so. Otherwise, retire."

"You refuse to surrender?"

"Certainly. Tomorrow we hope to blow your two ships out of the water."

Carruthers conducted the peppery surgeon to the hapless prisoners, let him see to their wounds, and sent him off again bootless. All of which rejoiced Carruthers greatly. . . .

The sun sank. The two boats crept back aboard ship with their report. Carruthers and his nine men, who took turns standing guard, supplied the prisoners with food and made their own evening repast. The stars came out, clear and cold; the breeze came up—and this time it was for them. Madagascar beckoned. The boat was loaded, and with lug-sail spread, could take them all to safety, once they were through the reefs.

"If we have to run for life, yes," said Carruthers. "But first I've a card to play. There are other men aboard those ships who'd join us gladly, and I mean to give 'em the chance. Also, there's our loot to take in another boat, if we had it. So give me a lift. Help carry this toy of mine to the south shore."

To their questions, he would give no answer.

"If I don't come back," he said, "take the boat and go."

WONDERING, they made shift to lift the toy, bore it to the south shore, and there floated it. Carruthers stripped, eyed the contraption in the starlight, saw that it floated well, and then deigned explanation.

"I'll guide it so it's headed straight to the ship," he said. The Frenchmen, who guessed something of his purpose, listened closely. "You see these wires? When it touches, the musket is set off, the bomb exploded—and if under the stern of the ship, it'll blow her to hell! But I must steer her close enough to make certain."

"The water is phosphorescent," said one man. "It'll give you away."

"The toy will bear me up. Only after I leave her and strike out for shore, will the flashes show. And the sentries will never see 'em. Good luck, lads! Watch for me, after the explosion."

He stepped into the water, pushed the section of mast ahead of him, and soon was out of his depth and floating easily with one hand on his craft.

IT worked according to all his calculations, the scrap of sail bearing it head first, the current and breeze drifting it along. Twenty minutes, he had reckoned, would take him around the end of the island and toward the ships.

An occasional stroke or two was all he needed, and this would not betray him.

The water was warm and balmy. He looked up at the cold, quiet stars, and thought of those gay, lordly men of the Company, there aboard the ship—the Company and the men he hated so bitterly. They, who in their utter despotism had wrecked his life and his future! Tyrants over India, over their own servants and officers, piling up vast fortunes for themselves. Why, that late captain of the *Douglass* had boasted that in one round trip he had amassed twenty thousand pounds!

"Honor and humanity gone," muttered Carruthers as he drifted; "and now they go after them to hell—all of them. The women will be safe enough. She'll not sink in a hurry; the corvette will take 'em all off! And after the tale Pleskett brought back, of our men and batteries, the corvette will be content to run for it and leave us be. Blast the lot of 'em!"

Around the island's end now. The current set straight for the two ships, the bit of breeze helped. When he was within a hundred feet of his goal, Carruthers calculated, he must point his torpedo aright, then turn and swim for it and chance bullets. He was sure of the result; he had tested his simple mechanism well. No drop of water had touched the musket with its powder-brimming pan.

It was very silent here in the water, moving him and the torpedo along. Sound echoed along the surface. He could hear the tramping of feet along the deck of the East Indiaman, the voices of men forward, a gay skirl of music from the mess-cabin. And then, suddenly, a voice from the carved stern-walk of the ship, the gallery out above the rudder.

"Upon my word! From the description Pleskett gave us, I could almost have sworn the man was Gordon!"

For an instant, Gordon Carruthers hung stupefied in the water. Another

voice put in so softly that he missed the words, but not the tone, not the voice itself.

"No, no, Mary," came response. His brother's voice, no doubt of it. "Right or wrong, there's no help for what's done. And Gordon would be the last to blame you."

Mary here—his brother here—there above the very spot where his machine must go off!

FOR a brief, terrible instant Carruthers clung to the spar, his brain afire. He had staked everything on this gamble, on this approaching moment; those men who had stuck with him, all the new horizon ahead, the future for the winning! Then the decision was made. He began to move convulsively, to push the spar from its course, to send it out around the stern of the great ship. Good God, he must never let his plan go through now!

"Look at the flashes in the water!" said Mary Cambridge. "Isn't it beautiful? No, that man ashore couldn't be Gordon. He was in another ship, some one told me—"

"Flashes? By heavens, it may be a man swimming—it must be! Those devils are planning something. On deck, there!" Carruthers heard his brother cry out sharply. "On deck! Alarm, there!"

Frantically, he changed the course of the thing. There lay the corvette beyond; he pointed it fairly, knew the current would sweep it fast and sure, and let go his hold.

Turning in the water, Carruthers headed now for the landing.

From the ship's deck a musket flashed. Voices were ringing; men were running. Another musket banged, then half a dozen at once. The flashes in the water were clear to see. But the loaded spar made no motion, caused no flash.

Ashore at the landing, the nine remaining men gathered at the water's edge, cursing, as they heard the crashing shots. Then, craning forward, one exclaimed:

"Look, mates! That be 'un a-swimming—see the flashes!"

A Frenchman exclaimed volubly. Two of the men splashed into the water as a white shape showed in the starlight. Carruthers, sure enough. They caught hold of him, dragged him up on the white coral sand.

He came to one knee, gasping.

"Take the boat and go, my lads—go!" he said, a stabbing catch in his voice. They crowded around. Then they saw the spreading splotch on his back—two of them.

Even as they perceived this, Carruthers wilted, came down on one hand.

"Off with you!" he ordered. "No use—with me—"

He slumped forward. And as they reached for him, a sudden sheet of flame sprang high across the water. Even before the bursting crash shook the air, that flame showed the corvette reeling and heeling over. Then the concussion. And almost at once, a second and more furious blast. The flame had reached in through the open gun-ports. For a moment the powder-strewn decks were lit by a murky infernal fire, as explosion after explosion ran along the deck, and a pall of smoke settled about the craft. The main magazine, by good chance, had not blown up.

Two of the men lugged Carruthers up, but he hung limp. They let him down again, felt for his heart, and knew he had gone ahead of them. Rapidly, they melted into the darkness, running full split, away for their boat and the passage through the reefs.

AND there lay all the story, as the French Consul came to its end.

"I like to think," he concluded slowly, rubbing the red teak stick with his long slender fingers, "how those others found him there in the morning. Did, perhaps, the brother and the woman ever come to realize how they had brought death upon him? Did they ever guess how he had averted death from them? One likes to play with such queries in the mind—"

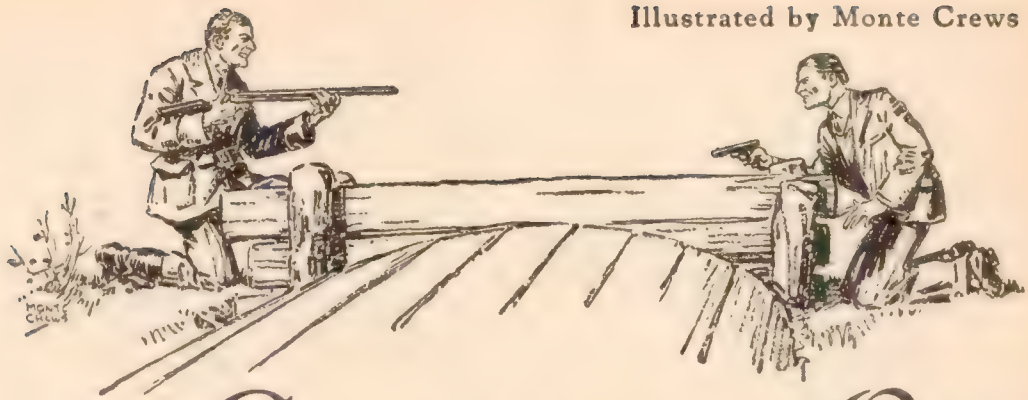
The Admiral cleared his throat. "But how the devil did you ever learn all this story, sir?"

The French Consul spread his hands and smiled.

"One of those Frenchmen, who escaped and later regained France, wrote down his story. He was my great-great-grandfather. The story came to me. When I was sent to Madagascar, I came one day to this same reef and found the hulk of an old wreck in the lagoon. You observe?" He held up his stick. "This beautiful red teak—it is from her timbers. And now, gentlemen, are you satisfied in regard to the first torpedo?"

Lincoln and Walt Whitman are leading characters in the next story of this fine series.

Illustrated by Monte Crews



The Great Horned Owl

This poignant little drama happens in a cranberry marsh.

By W. E. CARLETON

A BRIGHT April half-moon hung low over the pines when Deacon Obed Finney and his wife Hattie bumped over the hubbly woods-road to the cranberry bog. The weather-beaten green coupé stopped before a squatty bungalow.

The Deacon got out, then Hattie.

"What's that roaring sound?" Hattie asked. "You hear it?"

"Yup," the Deacon answered. "High water in the stream. Heavy spring rains we've been having. Can't do any harm, though. The flume's open."

He hauled out a loaded basket and a big bundle of bedding, and stalked with them toward the bungalow's rear door. Hattie followed, carrying a smaller basket and several parcels.

Deacon Obed Finney hadn't been born with a silver spoon in his mouth, but he made it his business to put one there. At the age of thirty-eight he owned nearly one hundred acres of cranberry bogs scattered over Plymouth County, built up from a meager start with the little half-acre bog where he and Hattie were now to stay for a few days. He had money in his pocket and money in the bank. Tall and lean, sun-browned as an Indian, he set the pace for his men when they wheeled the sand and spread it over the wiry green vines. He had won what he had by Yankee frugality and hard work.

He had put off taking unto himself a wife until he was certain of substantial financial footing. It was only about a year before that he and Hattie had teamed up. She was twenty-nine, blonde and laughing and blue-eyed. To strangers, it seemed that she was mismated with the grave, methodical Deacon, who wasn't much for looks, with serious gray eyes and a Puritanical nose and chin. But Plymouth folks who knew them—and most Plymouth folks did—never questioned Hattie's consent to becoming Mrs. Deacon Finney. He had a dry sense of humor, enjoyed a good time, and wasn't at all the solemn mossback he appeared. Hattie had too much life in her to tie up with a dead one.

They both looked forward to those little outings at the cranberry bog. He loved that half-acre tract better than all the other cranberry land he owned. The woods around it were denser; the quail whistled more sweetly; the trout in the stream that flowed through its middle were fatter. That was why he had built the bungalow there. It was escape from civilization in the town.

The Deacon halted in the shadow of the bungalow.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "There's a light in the little shanty down by the dam."

Hattie looked. "Who do you suppose has broken into it *this* time? Somebody's

always breaking in and keeping you buying new locks."

"Not this time," the Deacon chuckled. "I left the door unlocked. It's only some weary soul looking for lodging for the night. Somebody who's picked cranb'ries for me and knows I wouldn't object if he needed shelter. When we get the fire going and supper warmed up, I'll fetch him down a snack."

They went into the bungalow. The Deacon lighted a kerosene lamp and started a fire in the range. The kitchen and bedroom were damp and cold. The bungalow was furnished simply, but ruffled curtains showed a woman's interest in the place. Hattie kept it tidy.

She unpacked the basket and started to warm the beans and make tea, getting everything ready while the fire came up. She moved about and plied capable hands much as Priscilla Alden must have done in earlier days, and in the same county boundaries. The Deacon pumped some water, went to a closet and drew forth a double-barreled shotgun.

"What you going to do with that?" Hattie looked up from the bean-pot on the table.

The Deacon rested the gun across his knees and pointed to a white plaster that was spread over the top of his head.

"At the stroke of midnight or thereabouts," he declared, "the owl will die."

THE Deacon's evil designs on that particular specimen of the great horned owls were the natural result of a painful experience about a month before. At that time the bog was flooded with the water he kept over it every winter to protect the vines from the cold. Muskrats had been burrowing into the turf-and-sand dam, and he'd labored far into the night plugging up the holes they had dug, to save the leaking dam from a ruinous wash-out. It was moonlight, cold as Greenland, and he had been wearing a sealskin cap.

"What's that roaring sound?" Hattie asked. "You hear it?"

A sudden swish of wings over his head, and something landed on it like a brick dropped from high altitude. Sharp talons ripped and tore his scalp; but they didn't get in more than one good dig before they let go. That was all the Deacon remembered, for he had passed out; he was lying on the dam when he came to.

Hattie had patched him up as best she could and had driven him back to Plymouth. The doctor who treated him asked if he'd been tomahawked by an Indian.

Thereupon the Deacon delved into the habits of owls, the great horned owl in particular. He learned that he wasn't the first man wearing a fur cap who had been assaulted by one. The simple truth was that the owl had mistaken the fur cap for a live muskrat.

"I've found the tree where he roosts," the Deacon explained to Hattie. "I found the bones and fur of muskrats under it. He's been getting his living off muskrats since the stream thawed out. Probably still is; plenty of 'em in the dam, drat 'em! I've timed him by his hoots down by the dam, nights. He flies off, but always comes back around midnight. Same time he scalped *me!* Tonight I'll be laying for him under that tree. I'll get him!"

"I call that a spirit of revenge unbecoming to a church deacon," said Hattie as she stirred the sizzling beans in the skillet. "The owl was only doing what nature made him to do."

"That's all right," the Deacon came back; "but nature never made me so meek that I'll stand for having my head half torn off by any such infernal bird on my own property. A fowl with such poor eyesight isn't safe to be at large. Besides,"—he gave Hattie a quizzical side glance—"I've got a spot reserved for that old owl in our sitting-room at home."

Hattie straightened up at the stove. "A stuffed owl in our sitting-room?" she laughed. "That *would* be an ornament!"

"Sure it would." The Deacon slipped a couple of shells into the shotgun. "My father had a stuffed owl in our sitting-

room when I was a boy, and it was almighty attractive."

"I don't doubt that—attractive to dust and bugs and germs." Hattie's eyes were laughing, but there was firmness in her voice. "Our sitting-room is doing nicely just as it is. If you want to camp out in a museum of natural history, there's one in Boston. . . . Pull up your chair. Supper's ready."

They ate with appetites on edge from the resinous piny air. Hattie washed the dishes, and the Deacon dried them. Then they made up a small basket of beans and brown bread and a wedge of mince pie.

"I'm going down to the shanty with you," Hattie said. "Somehow tonight I don't feel like staying here alone."

The Deacon smiled. He got a thrill out of doing little kindnesses. He was a practical everyday sort of Christian, and his religion wasn't confined to parading up and down the church aisle and passing the contribution-box.

Nor was Hattie's limited to getting up church socials. She wasn't too proud to go into sickrooms and take over a nurse's not always pleasant tasks. She didn't hesitate to roll up her sleeves, scrub floors, and do the wash in an afflicted neighbor's home. The Deacon had a notion that she wasn't afraid to stay in the bungalow alone, but wanted to be on hand when the basket was presented.

He swung the shotgun over his shoulder, hooked his left arm under the basket-handle, and they set out like two Pilgrims going to meeting.

"But for heaven's sake, keep quiet while I'm laying for that owl," he cautioned.

"I will," she promised, "though I still think it's mean of you to kill the poor thing."

"Poor thing!" he grunted. "Poor, poor thing, to claw your spouse's brains out!"

It was only about two hundred yards to the shanty, a rough board shack used to house pickers when the crop was harvested in the fall. It was close to the bog near the dam—too close, in fact, for it was almost afloat when the water was up. The Deacon intended to have it moved farther back on the upland, but had not got around to having it done.

AS he and Hattie neared the shack, they saw a car standing close to it —not a scratched and ancient coupé like theirs, but a rakish, long-hooded light-green one, built for both looks and high

speed. The shack door was on the other side, facing the dam.

Hattie grasped the Deacon's arm. "Don't go in," she whispered. "This doesn't look right to me."

"Pshaw!" scoffed the Deacon. "It's all right. Anybody can ride in limousines these days, on easy-payment plans."

SO he wouldn't scare his unknown lodger, he leaned the shotgun against the shack wall before knocking on the door.

"It's me—Deacon Finney!" he hailed. "I've brought you down a mite of supper."

The door flew open. A wiry young fellow with a rat face, sharp nose and gimlet eyes stood framed in the lamplight. His hair was overdue for cutting, but smoothly slicked down.

"South Boston Flynn!" the Deacon gasped, and Hattie gave a little scream.

"Say, dis is a reg'lar Old Home Day!" the city rat snickered. "Only last October I was rusticatin' in dis palace, pickin' cranberries for youse. And here's the Missus, too! Now, aint dat nice! Meet me side-kick—Squint Voss."

A tawny-haired young guttersnipe stepped out from behind "South Boston" Flynn. One of his ice-blue eyes was contracted by a scar at the corner, giving it a slitted squint.

The Deacon's spine chilled as if iced. Hattie stood as rigid as a statue, and as pale. Only two nights before, the Boston newspapers had carried front-page pictures of that unsanctified pair. They had robbed a bank in a Boston suburb, killed a policeman, made a get-away, left a cold trail. The Deacon and Hattie had been especially interested, because South Boston had picked cranberries for them the previous fall. But that he and his pal would show up there, when the police of three States were on the watch for them, was the last thing the Deacon and Hattie would have imagined.

The Deacon, however, put on a bold front; he had dealt before with shady characters who came to the bog.

"Your supper'll get cold," he said, and he extended the basket to South Boston. "I only brought enough for one, but if you'll come to the bungalow, I'll give you more."

South Boston took the basket. He and Squint grinned at each other. Squint said:

"Dem Scollay Square berries smells good. Dat's sure sweet o' youse, sister."

"I'll get you more bedding," the Deacon offered. Anything to get back to the bungalow! He was nursing a wild plan to jump into his coupé with Hattie and cut loose for Plymouth and the police. He said, "Come on, Hattie," and turned to go. He forgot about the shotgun.

South Boston said: "Not so fast, brother!" He stood in the doorway, pointing an automatic pistol at them. Squint had a twin pistol in his hand.

"Put those things down!" the Deacon barked.

"Says you!" South Boston grated. "You two aint pullin' no fast ones on us and gettin' the cops hot. Last fall I spotted dis dump for a swell hide-away. We doped out ya might come snoopin' round; dat's why we didn't bust into the bungalow. It's just too bad for you—"

Squint whispered to him and South Boston grinned, nodded.

"Lady, ya stay right here and behave yerself," he ordered Hattie. "Me and Mr. Finney is takin' a little walk for our health, and talkin' dis t'ing over."

"No!" Hattie cried. She had borne up bravely, but now she broke. "You can't do that. Let us go. We'll stay in the bungalow till you've gone. We won't call the police."

"Do what he says, Hattie," the Deacon told her. "I'm sure South Boston and I can straighten this business out."

Squint chirped up: "Yeah, you said it, brother."

THE Deacon had no idea he and South Boston would straighten anything out. He knew that gangsters took men for rides, rubbed them out when they stood in the way. He and Hattie stood very much in the way of South Boston and Squint, who planned to hide out at the lonely bog until they felt that the coast was clear for a dash to other parts. The chances were that he'd never come back from that "walk."

He wasn't a coward who would desert his wife; he'd die fighting to defend her. But if he resisted, he'd be shot down without a chance; Hattie too, probably. South Boston and Squint were desperate killers, doomed to the chair if captured. The chair would be no hotter for two more murders chalked up against them.

Hattie sank onto the doorstep and wept, while South Boston and the Deacon started out together. The ratty killer told him to follow the dam toward the flume, kept close behind him while he strode along the sandy barrier. The freshet rushing through the flume roared like the Niagara rapids, and glistened like a flow of molten steel in the moonlight. Fine place to talk, that was!

HE glanced back at South Boston. The killer was bringing up his pistol. The Deacon saw through his scheme—to shoot his captive down and hurl the body into the current.

The Deacon beat him to it: he hurled himself in head-first!

Orange jets of flame stabbed from South Boston's pistol. The Deacon hit the water and was whisked away on a dizzy shoot-the-chutes. His head went under, and he kicked and clawed like a drowning cat. His head bobbed out, and he gasped and strangled. The current was too swift for him to grab the bank; it was sweeping him on toward Widgeon Pond—where, if he didn't sink before, he would surely drown; he couldn't swim.

But between the bog and the pond there was a plank bridge, used for trucking cranberries in picking season. The Deacon's eyes were peeled for it when he could see through the spray. Ordinarily it was high above the stream, but with that freshet close to the top of the banks, it would now be lower. The question was, how low?

He caught sight of its dark bulk overhead. He reached up a hand, grabbed as he shot under it. He caught it! The stream *was* high enough.

He hauled himself along the plank ends to the bank, swallowing enough water to make a swimming-pool for a frog. He dragged himself up, stretched out, gasped like a gaffed salmon.

As he lay there getting his wind, he had his first chance to think things over. It all seemed too fantastic to be real. But there he was, soaked to the skin, chilled to the bone. And there was Hattie, a prisoner at the shack, held by two city weasels who would stop at nothing!

The bog was deep in the semi-wilderness, no telephone for miles. It would

take hours for him to make a dash and bring help. By the time help arrived, Hattie might be dead. Or held as hostage, to be shot down by the two killers if the police refused their terms.

"I've got to get Hattie out of this mess myself," the Deacon choked. "Unless—unless they've already done away with her and thrown her into the flume."

He looked into the racing water. It would be like looking for a chip in a millrace to locate a human body there. But the wild stream gave him an idea. If Hattie were still alive, that freshet might prove his best ally.

He thrashed through brush back to the dam. He knew cranberry bogs; best of all, he knew his own little pet bog. At the flume he stopped, and put in four planks, the number used to flood the bog for the winter. If left in long enough, those planks would raise the water until it surrounded the shack, which was built on cedar posts. . . . The roar of the stream ceased as it met the blockade.

The one window in the shack showed a light; the door was closed.

The big upland pine where the owl roosted cast a long shadow across the dam, and onto the dense green vines of the bog. He kept his eyes peeled for South Boston, but saw no one. He stole across the mowed briar stubble at the end of the dam, prowled to the shack with the stealth of a panther. He had to get his shotgun. There was an old horse-pistol in the bungalow, but he wasn't sure there were any cartridges for it.

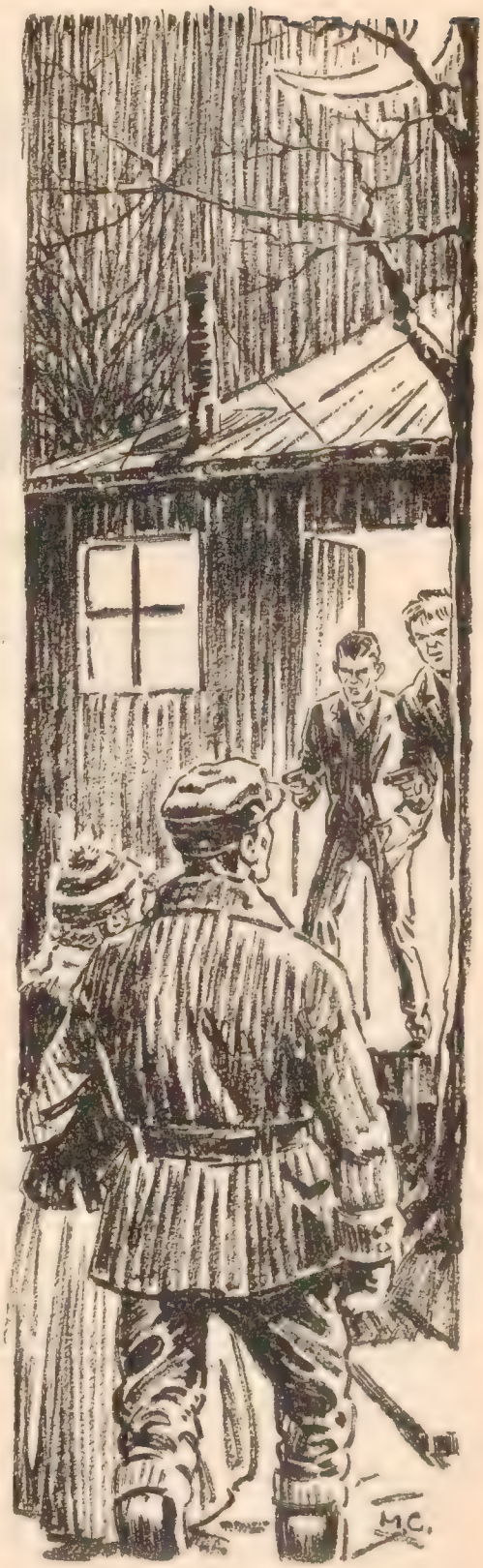
South Boston's voice came from inside the shack. He probably thought he had shot the Deacon, or wounded him so that he had drowned. He and Squint were eating, talked with crammed mouths. One of them must have ransacked the bungalow. Hattie was crying, begging them to untie her hands and feet.

"Thank God!" the Deacon mumbled. At least they hadn't killed her yet!

There was the shotgun, where he had left it. He picked it up with hands that almost caressed it, started to throw the door open, take the murderous pair by surprise. But he decided:

"No. They're too handy with those pistols. And I might hit Hattie. I'll stick to my first scheme."

Back to the dam he crept, broke the shotgun open to make sure it was still loaded. It was. The water was now rising above the tops of the vines. With the flume holding that freshet, it wouldn't take long to put two feet of water over



"Say, dis is a reg'lar Old Home Day!" the city rat snickered. "Aint dat nice! Meet me side-kick — Squint Voss."

The Deacon knew he'd never come back from that "walk"; but if he resisted, he'd be shot down without a chance.

the half-acre bog—and around the cedar posts on which the shack was perched.

He waited, tense, ready with the shotgun. The thin line of water crept higher and higher under the shack. Tiny waves lapped along the dam. Eventually the bandits would hear that sound, notice that the roar of the flume had ceased, realize something was wrong.

The shack door flew open sooner than he expected. South Boston appeared in the yellow oblong, yelled:

"Cripes! The whole damned country is flooded out!"

He grabbed his pistol, came tearing out, splashed into water that was over his ankles. Squint, pistol in hand, bolted out in his wake.

"What the hell!" he squalled. "We gotta get the bus out of it!"

"Halt where you are!" the Deacon hailed them. "Drop those pistols, or I'll shoot!"

The two men in the water stopped, stared at the dam.

"The hick!" howled Squint. Instead of dropping his pistol, he jerked it up, took a shot at the Deacon. It was hasty, and it missed.

The Deacon didn't wait for a second one that might be truer. He cuddled the shotgun stock against his shoulder and blazed away.

Squint went down like a chopped flagpole. And to the Deacon's amazement, South Boston went down too. They had been close together when he fired.

"God be merciful!" he cried. "I didn't mean to shoot 'em *both!*"

He clambered down the side of the dam, went splashing over to where the two had fallen. The thought that he had killed two men sickened him, made his legs wabbly. He couldn't see well. He hoped he hadn't killed them, then began to pray that he hadn't.

SO it happened that he was caught off guard by South Boston, who was on one knee, pointing a pistol at him.

"Drop that crow-shooter!" the ratty bandit snarled. "Thought ya'd got me, huh? Naw, brother, ya never nicked me. I dropped because I was expectin' the second barrel. G'wan, chuck the cannon!"

The Deacon's shotgun was lowered—useless, unless he wanted to commit suicide. He pitched it high up on the dam. It fell with a thud, as if it had hit something harder than sand. South Boston jumped up, hauled and shook Squint's body. He said:

"Ya got *him,* all right. We was goin' to let the Missus go when we cleared out, but now ya *both* get the works."

The Deacon stared at the pistol muzzle. "Shoot away," he said, "but the joke will be on *you.* How you going to get your car out? It'll bog down to the hubs. It'll take two men to pull the planks out of the flume, with this head of water jamming 'em in. Then where'll you be? Where'll the police be?"

South Boston scowled, licked his lips. The Deacon's reminder sank in. The higher the water rose, the harder time he'd have getting the car out. He said:

"O. K. We'll pull the planks out together. I'll climb up on the dam first; then you come. Don't try pullin' no fast ones, and you and the Missus go loose. Get me?"

The Deacon wasn't fooled; he believed South Boston as far as he'd take the word of a chicken thief. But South Boston's proposition at least gave him a feeble straw to cling to. He watched the city gunman claw his way up to the crest of the dam, then climbed up himself. Never did South Boston let go of his pistol. He was always ready to whip around with it if the Deacon made a suspicious noise, or tried to break away.

As soon as his head rose above the dam, the Deacon looked around in the moonlight. He made out a ten-foot plank lying there. He remembered it. It was a plank he had used as a bridge over muskrat cave-ins the night the owl swooped down on him. After the excitement that followed, he had forgotten to remove it. He started toward it.

"Hey, where you goin'?" South Boston snarled, shook the pistol.

"We may need this plank," the Deacon replied. "Never can tell. Better take it along, anyhow."

South Boston didn't ask any questions as the Deacon stooped and picked up the plank. Not being versed in the fine points of running a cranberry bog, he had to take it for granted that the Deacon knew his business. But that ugly pistol was always on the job, the hand that held it nervous, the eyes above it vigilant.

THE Deacon walked to the flume, strode over the wooden bridge that covered it, put down the plank.

"Grab hold of your end of the top plank in the flume," he instructed South Boston. "I'll grab my end. We'll pull it out together."

South Boston knelt, grabbed his end of the flume plank with one hand, held his pistol with the other. They lifted. The Deacon's end came up a little. South Boston's end didn't budge.

"You'll have to use both hands," said the Deacon. "What you afraid of? How am *I* going to hurt you?"

He said it in a hopeless, resigned tone. South Boston grinned. And in that grin the Deacon read his doom and Hattie's. When those planks were out, South Boston would finish them off quick. The body of Squint lying under the water was reason enough for it.

South Boston hesitated, then laid down his pistol, put both hands to the flume plank. The Deacon reached down, seized his end with both hands. They were both on their knees.

"There—pull!" shouted the Deacon.

South Boston hauled with might and main. But the Deacon didn't pull. He whirled on one knee; his hands swung away from the flume, made a sweeping motion to one side.

South Boston let go of the plank, snatched up his pistol.

But as he whisked it around, the Deacon sang out:

"Give up, or the devil will take in *two* steady boarders!"

South Boston let the pistol fall. The Deacon had the muzzle of a double-barreled shotgun stuck under his nose, and he knew that one of those barrels was still loaded.

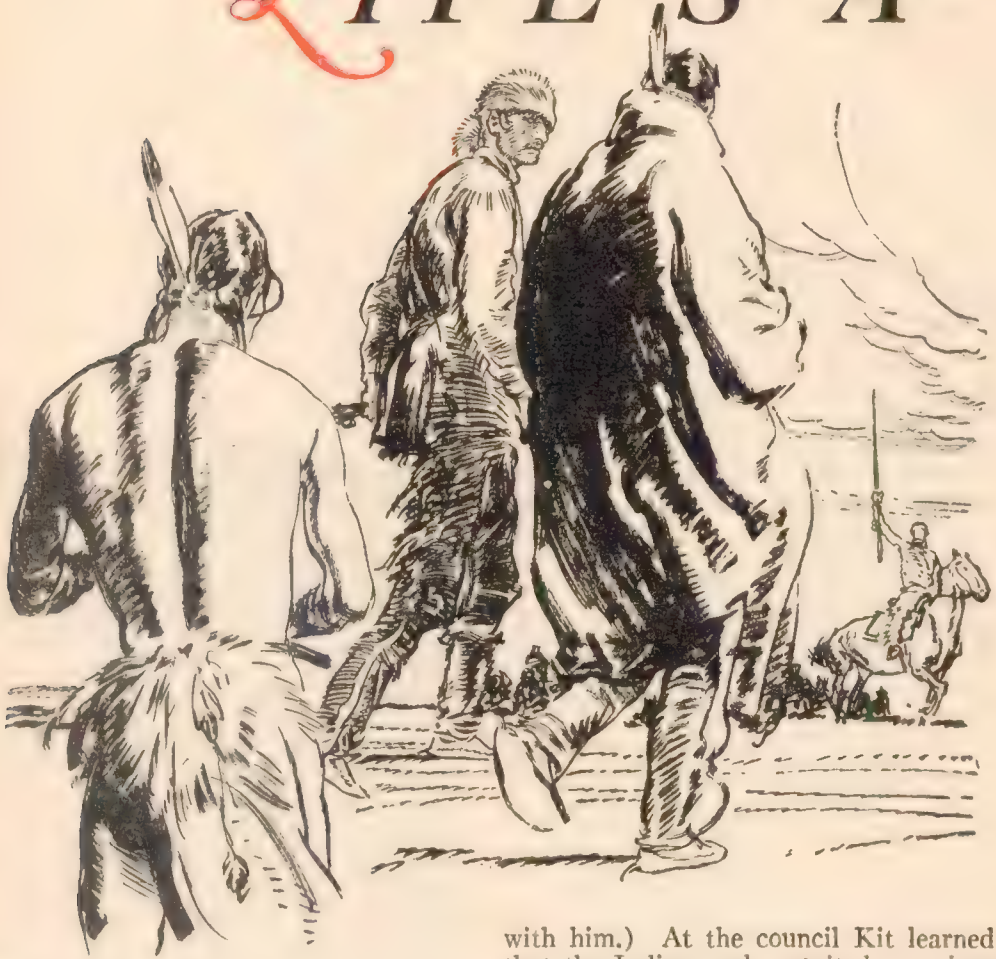
"WHAT gave me the idea," the Deacon afterward said, "was that thud the shotgun made when I tossed it up on the dam. So when I saw the plank, I looked for the shotgun too—found it beside the plank, half covered with loose sand. When I picked up the plank, I picked up the shotgun with it, held the plank so as to hide it, laid the plank over it at the flume. Then when South Boston laid down his pistol and pulled, I flipped the plank over, grabbed up the shotgun and—well, I guess the Lord figured I'd had enough heartaches for one night, and sort of helped me out."

And he told how he cut Hattie loose, and they delivered South Boston, tied up like a mummy, at the police station in town. Then he made the discovery that the shotgun mechanism was smashed and it wouldn't shoot.

"But I calculate South Boston felt too lost without his pistol to resist, anyhow," he expressed his opinion to Hattie. "Just about then, I was worried more about you than him. Thank God, they hadn't harmed you!"

There's a stuffed great horned owl in the Deacon's parlor now. He and Hattie picked it out from specimens in a Boston taxidermist's shop. It's a monument to the bird that was responsible for the Deacon's having the shotgun and plank that night—a reminder of another great horned owl that still on moonlit nights swoops upon muskrats at the cranberry-bog dam. And will for years to come, if the Deacon and Hattie have anything to say about it.

LIFE'S A



The Story Thus Far:

THE fate of all Western America hung in the balance, that fateful year! In the Northwest the great Hudson's Bay Company was pressing on with new outposts, and their experience in dealing with the Indians made them formidable rivals. In the Southwest a great gathering of the Indian tribes threatened an alliance and a savage war that would drive the few white trappers back to the Mississippi.

Not easily driven were these white trappers, however. . . . Kit Carson, one of their leaders, left Bent's Fort one night, and on the invitation of the Hudson's Bay man Shunan, attended a great Indian council at their camp near by. (Kit had saved Shunan's beautiful half-breed daughter Marie, known as Go Everywhere Woman, from a fight at a fandango in Santa Fé, and she had been greatly taken with him.) At the council Kit learned that the Indians only awaited a curious "medicine-sign"—the appearance of a white beaver—to begin their uprising.

Afterward Kit, carried off captive by the Indians, escaped, and with his friends Rube Herring and Laforay was making a desperate defense from behind their dead horses, when Shunan's daughter appeared, and through her great influence among the Indians, saved him. . . .

With his partners, Kit spent the rest of the season trapping; and one morning, to his intense surprise, he found a white beaver—an albino, presumably—in his trap. He skinned the animal and hid the pelt in the middle of his bale; but shortly thereafter the Blackfeet raided the camp and stole the fur-bales. After a swift pursuit his partners' bales were recovered, but Kit's—the white pelt within it—was carried off. And the fate of an empire hung on that strange "medicine" token.

(The story continues in detail:)

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FIGHT, KIT!

By

GORDON KEYNE

Illustrated by
Jeremy Cannon

A flame-vivid novel of the winning of the West.

AT the "Valley of the Green"!

A name to ring afar for a few brief years, a name to bulk large in the gripping of an empire; a name to reëcho through the history of conquest, and then to die and be forgotten before new and more momentous events. This was no town, no permanent settlement, but an evanescent and lawless no-man's land, a spontaneous upgrowth of men from all quarters of the compass, met for convenience.

The willowed, grassy flats of the broad valley, where the limpid current of the Green River reflected the blue sky, were gay and noisy, raucous but not turbulent. Here was an enormous rolling mélange of bloods and 'breeds; trappers with their spring catch, traders with their goods, Nez Percés and Flatheads from the northwest, Snakes from the north, Arapahoes from the east, Utes from the south.

Carson, arrived intent on business, closed his ears to the whoops of welcome, let Herring and Laforay drift whither they pleased, and cast about for Jim Bridger. Jim was something like head chief to all mountain men, second to none in his vast experience, his shrewdness, his ability and force of character.

At long length Carson sighted Bridger holding revel in a circle of whites and reds, and rode to the spot. Shouts of greeting and recognition met him. Bridger looked up with shrewdly puckered gray eyes in a square, lean, sparsely whiskered face of tanned leather.

"How, Kit! 'Light and join the council. Aint seen you since you come in from hunger trail, last rendezvous."

"Not now. I've business afoot. I'd like a word with you."

"Better have a drink first. No? All right. My lodge is yonder."

Bridger rose to spare and powerful height, and stepped out quickly, rifle on shoulder. He led the way to where his own lodge was pitched. Carson dis-

mounted, and they sat together under the cone of buffalo hides.

"Ears are open," Bridger prompted. "What's the word?"

Carson launched into unwonted garrulity.

"I wintered in Taos, went into the mountains on spring hunt out o' Bent's Fort—me, Rube Herring and Laforay the Iroquois breed; we met up and went on. Our catch was prime. Blackfeet trailed us and stole every trap and every pelt. Herring and Laforay got their bales back. I aim to get mine."

Bridger sensed importance to come.

"What are the Blackfeet doing that far south?"

"A party of them were at Bent's. I sat in a big council, biggest gather of a winter camp I ever saw."

"Huh? You in council?"

Carson nodded. "Shunan, the Hudson's Bay Frenchie, spread his blanket for me. Plenty Eagle said yes to it."

"That head Blackfoot devil?" Bridger's face wrinkled again. "Shunan, hey? What tribes there?"

"Cheyennes, 'Rapahoes, Utes, Comanches, Blackfeet, a few Sioux. I've a yarn for you."

"Shoot. Ears are open."

Carson sped forth the story, all of it, keeping the most incredible fact to himself, but giving all he knew otherwise, all he had heard. He concluded:

"It's war to wipe out the Americans, both sides the mountains; that's the medicine. The Hudson's Bay will keep Oregon, then push east and grab everything."

Bridger spat. "Huh! Hell's full of Injuns whose medicine didn't work ag'in' powder and lead. Shunan and his 'breed gal—I'll tell Shunan his scalp's mighty loose on his head. Gal wants you, hey? And you don't want her?"

"Anybody'd want her," said Carson, not shirking the truth. "But I'm shy of Blackfoot blood. And Shunan—I aint looking to get my hind paw in a trap."

Bridger grinned, then frowned.

"White-beaver as sign of strong-hearts? Injuns stealing traps for use? That beats ary dream of mine. Sleep or 'wake, I never did see a white beaver."

"Happens I have."

Bridger swung alert, unbelieving gaze upon him. "No! For sure?"

Without warning the blanket was snatched off them. Carson was astounded to see it was Marie. . . . She blazed: "So you do not come to me, but sit under a blanket with that girl!"

"In my own trap. A white she-beaver. I took the pelt, put it away safe, kept my mouth shut."

Shrewd gray eyes probed. "When?"

"Last month on way over."

"Where?"

"On one of the heads of the Arkansaw."

"By God! You aint lying, Kit," Bridger whistled softly, then slapped his leather thigh. "She won't have dropped white pups for Blackfoot traps, anyhow. She'd breed back, same as white and Injun. Your hair won't be safe till you've sold that damned medicine out of the country. Where's the pelt?"

"In the middle of that bale the Blackfeet stole."

BRIDGER straightened under the impact, straightened and sat in tense silence. He comprehended everything, brain groping at details and threads.

"Hell! That's the spark for dry timber," he said slowly. The vision was swift and sure, of that Great Spirit sign being taken from village to village, from tribe to tribe, of medicine-men at work, of eager fanatic warriors lashed to bloody frenzy.

"Does anybody know?" he shot out.

"Not from me. There's a chance of getting back. Is McKay and the Hudson's Bay outfit here at rendezvous?"

"Yep. You'll find 'em over yonder on the Big Sandy fork. Shunan and his gal are over there too. She's a fetching piece, right enough, but I'd as soon give lodge-room to a wolf dam with cubs."

Carson nodded. "I'm carrying talk to Shunan, damn him! And to McKay. They'll know where that bale of mine is."

"Likely so," agreed Bridger. "By God, you get that bale 'fore it's opened up by ary Injun, or we'll be flashing lead along the trap-lines for next ten years! So you aint throwing in with the Britishers?"

Carson merely grunted for response.

"Any 'Rapahoes here?" he asked. "How about Sights the Enemy?"

"Yep, he's here, and his family too." Bridger's eyes twinkled. "You'd better shine up to that gal. High time you set up a lodge of your own, with somebody to keep it warm for you."

"Thinking of that myself," said Carson. "I've already made Sights the Enemy a present. Singing Bird aint come to trap, but she's willing, I reckon."

He rose. Bridger followed him from the lodge, imparting his own news now.

"Strangers in camp this season, Kit. Two missioners for Oregon. A sky pilot and a doctor feller. And say! I've got a yarn to pretty near beat your'n! The doc says that next year there'll be white women on the trail!" Bridger guffawed. "I tell him the Green will dry up and South Pass be a hole in the ground before white women cross the mountains."

"White women?" Carson stared. It was inconceivable. "What would they do if they did ever get across?"

"Well, he's got a notion more will foller. Missioners' and settlers' women, both. He's got bad medicine dreams. Claims that once Oregon gets settled up with white families to lay holt of land, the Britishers and their Injun trade-posts won't be nowhere. Queer feller, this doc. Aint all crazy, though."

Carson shrugged off the news with scant interest, and rode on to the Arapahoe camp.

HE noted the lodge of Sights the Enemy, familiar to him with its painted tokens. Singing Bird would be there, he opined; as pretty as her name. A little thrill rose in him at thought of her now, of her closeness. Not at all the same sort of thrill Go Everywhere Woman wakened in him. He would stop off here, on the chance of a word with her. If he got his pelts back, he would have enough to lay down on the nail and take her away.

Carson drew rein abruptly, as a figure came into his path and stood there. A young Arapahoe, of warrior rank; he looked down at the sullen face of Brave Elk. A fine, promising warrior, Brave Elk, but what of that? A white man had the call when a likely squaw was ready for the bidding.

"You come again. You do no good," Brave Elk gave blunt greeting. "You had better turn around."

"What's the matter, Brave Elk?"

"She is not for you. You won't see her," exploded the warrior. He must have noted Carson's approach, had no doubt been waiting for this moment. "The price is twenty horses. You're poor. You have nothing."

IT was unpleasant truth, which made Carson's smile fade. Twenty horses? This was greedy value, if Sights the Enemy had really set it.

"So you think I'm poor?"

"It is true. I know. Powder and guns will buy horses. Do you bring beaver to trade for powder? No. You are as poor now as you were last summer. That is the word. She is promised for twenty horses. I have eight. When I get ten, I'll offer them. She will not marry that red-faced Sun Buffalo."

Carson's brain blazed with sudden hot light. Shunan! Shunan, by the gods! It was Shunan who had sent those Blackfoot braves to robbery of trap and camp. Shunan, making him poor with doubled design, leaving him in debt to the Hudson's Bay, bidding for the Arapahoe girl himself, playing his 'breed daughter's game to catch Carson's hand.

"I'll talk with Sights the Enemy," said Carson, and rode on to the lodge.

Singing Bird was outside. He dismounted, but scarcely had he uttered a word when she covered her face and ran into the lodge. "No, I am afraid," came her voice softly. Then her father stepped through the entrance, but gave the visitor no sign of greeting, only a level stare.

"How?" said Carson, and went on in the Arapahoe tongue: "You are well? I would talk with you."

"I see you again," answered Sights the Enemy. "You make trouble. I ask you to keep away."

Carson kept down hot impulse. "I hear you are going to sell Singing Bird. Is that true?"

"She will bring me twenty horses. That is the offer. When the man comes with twenty horses, she will go away with him."

"I made you a present that you wanted."

Sights the Enemy smiled. "You have no horses. You are poor. The man who offered the horses is a head man. He is rich."

And with this clincher, Sights the Enemy turned his back and went into his lodge again, deliberately insulting the moneyless rascal who dared seek the hand of a woman.

Shunan, eh? Carson lifted his mount, nursed his rage with a thudding gallop as he headed for the fork of the Big Sandy. His first blazing fury was gone, was settled into a deadly consuming anger that went deep. No danger now of losing his head. There were things to discuss which would not bear discussion, suspicions, resentments, unproven accusations. But now there was one open subject which would bear more than mere discussion, might serve as peg on which to hang all. And why not come out with everything, settle Shunan's pretence of friendship at one crack?

The camp of the Hudson's Bay party was unmistakable. Indians, gay 'breeds aflash with color, squaws, children, song and laughter and staccato voices; the buoyancy of high spirits and prospering business. All one big family, this, welded together by mixture of bloods.

And there was Shunan, yes, his hulking seated form, flaming visage uplifted. He had seen Carson's arrival. Now he lifted to his feet as Carson's horse bore in and scattered the yapping dogs.

Carson halted with a plunge, rifle over knees. Sight of the man lifted his blood in hot boil. He sat his mount, waiting upon word or movement that would put finger to trigger. The words he had meant to say jammed in his throat, flooded into his fixed, intent gaze. Shunan read the hot blue eyes and shifted grip on fusil, ever so slightly, with tensing of the huge muscles and wary question in the narrowed eyes under the bushy red brows.

THEN he relaxed, grounded his fusil butt, brushed caution aside with an easy laugh and a gesture of free hand.

"Leetle Chief? He is welcome," he said, all too friendly. "I have expected you. Here to see Captain McKay?"

"Here to see you," snapped Carson.

"And nobody else? Well, well, get down, man! My lodge is yours."

"No blanket is big enough for the two of us to sit on, Shunan. I can talk plenty as I am. Damn your lodge! So you set those Injuns on me, did you?"

"Non! Non!" declared Shunan. "I sent Marie and Plenty Eagle and saved your life from those bad hearts. You must believe."

"Where are my beaver?"

Shunan laughed. "By gar! For your life you swap a few beaver, and you are mad! That is one joke. Two bale you get back. Maybe you get your bale too."

"So you know about it all."

"Sure. Plenty Eagle sent me a picture of the marks on the bale. My frien', I hide nothing. It is too bad you keep your hair and lose your furs, *hein?* You are damn' foolish. What is one leetle bale of beaver to the rich trail I have showed you?"

CARSON dared venture nothing more as to the bale, lest its importance be guessed and it be examined.

"Your tongue is split, Shunan," he said. "I warned you to leave Singing Bird alone. Now you think to get her. Leave her alone, or I'll flash lead through you!"

No mistaking this quiet deadliness. Shunan drew himself up.

"She is for Shunan; it is all arranged. Twenty horses. I will pay them. But you, Leetle Chief, you do not have to pay. A common squaw for Leetle Chief? *Non!* He can have a wife who will make him rich and ask for herself nothing. I have tol' you the truth. Look! She is strong medicine, no?"

She was coming from the lodge, she herself—Go Everywhere Woman. The glowing face, the eyes of allure, the vermilion-parted braids, the warm tawny sleekness of her, striking the senses. She came forward, smiling.

"Kit Carson is come to the Hudson's Bay and the lodge of Shunan?" Her voice was rich music. "He brings no beaver or horse. Yet I see him rich, strong, powerful! What does he want in this camp?"

Invitation in the query. Perhaps it was quite true that she liked him; this would explain many things. Carson looked at her, closed his mind against her. She was enough to drive a man out of his head. He thought upon his white beaver.

"I want Tom McKay," he said curtly.

"Him first, good." And Shunan nodded, beaming, refusing to accept hostility. "That is right. He will be easy found. He expects you. And when you have talked with him, come back. We will smoke. This lodge is yours."

Carson rode away, not trusting himself to words.

He went through the camp to the lodge of McKay, and his relief was quick. No deep guile here. Tom McKay, chief of the Hudson's Bay brigade in these eastern limits of Oregon, was a man well liked. Generous, impulsive, tall and powerful, dark with the strain of Ojibwa mother, courteous with his upbringing in the Company. He and Carson sat in talk together, and after the opening civilities Carson came to the point.

"On my way here, the Blackfeet robbed me of my traps and furs."

McKay nodded. "I know. Why do you, an American, come to me?"

"One of your men, Shunan, put them up to it. Do the Hudson's Bay people rob Americans in American territory?"

"I've heard about it; Shunan explained it to me. You bought your life with your traps and beaver. That's how the Blackfeet look at it, Carson. If you want your property back, go to the Blackfeet for it."

"The bale is bloody. Blackfeet were killed," answered Carson. "I'll keep my hair yet a while, but I mean to have the bale back."

"Suppose it's sent in to me, for trade?" said McKay. "The Blackfeet will ask guns, powder, lead, blankets. Will you pay me the values?"

"If I get sight of it in Blackfeet hands, I'll pay for it with burned powder," threatened Carson coolly. "But I'll count my own furs, thanks. The bale is mine, with my mark on it. What's your next word?"

HIS tone held unuttered menace in case of refusal. Here was no man to be lightly antagonized or pushed too far. McKay sat steadily regarding him, eyes thoughtful.

"You shall have your bale," he said at last. "Carson, I can do what all the Americans in your camp cannot do. I will send one man to Plenty Eagle's lodge and demand the stolen bale. Plenty Eagle will give it up. If he refuses, he and his people will never get one ounce of goods from the Company. The trouble shall cost you nothing. On the contrary—"

McKay paused and reflected. Carson lowered his eyes to keep the flash of exultant thought from showing. To get them back—this way! To have McKay hand them over, and with them the whole empire of his seeking! Jim Bridger would roar when he heard of this. But there was to be bargaining.

"Well?" prompted Carson. "I must tell you that I'll pay what I owe you, soon as I can do so."

"Yes, you're on the brigade's books from last year. No matter. You were unfortunate. You're still unfortunate, Carson, and I'm opening the way to better fortune. Did you get word from me that I hoped to see you here? I see you did. You're an American, but the Company will treat you well. Here's future and fortune for you; and Captain Shunan's daughter is worth many bales of beaver to any man. This is what I have to say: In return for the favor I do you, will you march from rendezvous with the Hudson's Bay for the winter hunt?"

"WHY ask that?" Carson demanded bluntly. "I said that I'd pay what I owe from last year. I must get my beaver to do it."

"I want you, Carson, but the benefit's mutual," said McKay. "You're a first-class trapper, guide, agent. You stand high, among the first of them all, and plenty more will follow you into my camp. Over here, you'll lose nothing, not even a bale of pelts. Over there, with the unorganized Americans, you'll lose everything, including your life. You Americans don't know how to get along with the Indians—"

The implication struck fire.

"Yes," said Carson dryly. "I heard the talk of your agent and that dancing girl when the Blackfeet sat in council. I heard the talk you sent about white beaver and the rest of the nonsense."

"Wait, man!" broke in McKay sharply. "The Hudson's Bay Company cannot control the dreams of Indians. I myself laughed at Plenty Eagle when I heard about white beaver medicine. I sent no such talk. You shouldn't imply it to me."

"Right," Carson admitted. "But you knew of it. You're back of it."

McKay gestured. He took the accusation to heart deeply—too deeply by a good deal, thought Carson.

"But if the sign should really be found, Carson—look out! You know what it'd mean. After all, why would the Indians fight Americans? Because you take. You give only blows or dishonest goods. Why the devil do your people bring their traps and quarrels across into the Company's territory, anyhow?"

"Let us talk—" began Shuman. Then his fusil roared in Carson's very face.

"Company's?" Carson's brows went up. "As much ours as yours."

"No. There's only one American trading-post west of the mountains. Fort Hall, out there on the upper Snake. And it's starving for lack of trade. The Hudson's Bay has many posts, is supreme in the Oregon country from coast to mountains. Always will be. Within a year, Carson, you'll see the Company's flag flying from Fort Hall."

"And on east of the mountains next, you figure."

McKay, who had spoken with unwonted vigor, now tempered his assurance with a candid, friendly laugh.

"Well, that's only another step. And if the United States can't hold all that country from the Indians, better give over the bad bargain to people who can. However, you've heard my proposition. What's your answer?"

"I'll think it over," said Carson, to see what would happen. To his surprise, McKay only nodded pleasantly.

"It'll take me several days to get the bale," the factor said. "I'll keep it and apply the pelts on your account, or shall we forget the account altogether?"

Carson reddened a little.

"Neither one, McKay. Get the bale, if you will, and then hold it for me. We'll not forget the account. I'm on your books. You know I'm good for it. I'll settle the debt, but I'll settle it in my own way, thanks."

"Right, then. I'll get the bale for you, Carson. *Au revoir, m'sieur!*"

They parted pleasantly, with mutual respect and esteem. Carson was flattered that he was so badly wanted, that the Hudson's Bay would go to such lengths to have him join up. Yet the thought rankled. Buy him with goods, with beaver, with the daughter of a 'breed—buy him like a squaw, at price of self-respect! That rankled.

AND here was Shunan in his path, not to be dodged. Carson drew rein.

"You have a good talk with Captain McKay?" came the hearty words. "You get your beaver soon, *hein?* All is arrange', then?"

"Not all, Shunan. I've something to arrange with you," Carson said steadily. "You're to let Singing Bird alone. Understand?"

"*Hein?* Captain McKay, he say that?"

"I say it, with straight tongue."

Their eyes met and held. Then Shunan stepped aside with a shrug.

"You threaten Shunan? You are damn' ungrateful. If you want the squaw, why don't you take her? She not speak to you. She speak to me, come to my lodge. Bah! Somebody is there to take the shine off that leetle squaw, somebody who wants you—"

Carson rode on. But the rolling voice followed him, like an arrow between his shoulders.

"Ho! I do what I please, today, tomorrow! You seek trouble, you get it!"

He made no reply, but rode on.

McKay's proposition burned in his heart. Go over to the Britishers? If he had to do it, yes; if that were the price to pay for getting the white beaver back. But there remained a move or two in the bargaining. Carson chuckled as he thought of them. Tom McKay had overreached himself, if he were to insist. If generous, he must be met generously. If he insisted on his condition, however—

But now to talk with Singing Bird.

CHAPTER VII

CARSON took post and waited, interminably, patiently, assuredly.

Stationed here in the outskirts of the Arapahoe camp, in an open spot among the brush and trees, he knew that the girl would have seen him but would make no sign. He could glimpse her as she busied herself around the lodge. Others might have seen him also, but it was not their business. Courting was a formal procedure, and eyes were blind to it.

Sights the Enemy, mounting his horse, had ridden away on errands of his own, and Carson knew he had not long to wait now. Sure enough, the girl came presently with hide bucket in hand and blanket flung about her shoulders, as though going for water. She pretended not to know of his presence.

She passed near him. Carson had only to do as was expected of any lover. He stepped lightly, quickly, came to her side and drew her to him. She yielded, the blanket opened to him, and it enveloped them both. Covered by the one blanket, they crouched cheek to cheek. Sights the Enemy would have stormed furiously had he known, but to all others the blanket lodge was sanctuary, by right of custom.

The girl was trembling. "We do wrong. I am afraid."

"Not of me, Singing Bird?"

"No. Of Shunan, and that girl. They have threatened."

So? Go Everywhere Woman was in the game too, eh? Carson heated to the thought. She meant to have him, to force him, to trick him into taking her!

"Wait a few days, and you'll slap Shunan in the face," he said grimly. "If he makes trouble, I'll kill him. He's had warning."

"Brave Elk asks for me too," she said.

"You like Brave Elk?"

"Yes, but I like you better—"

WITHOUT warning, without a footstep heard, the blanket was suddenly snatched off, almost upsetting them. An insult only to be washed out in blood.

Carson leaped to his feet, blade bared, poised for thrust—then checked himself. It was not the young warrior Brave Elk, as he had at first thought. He was astounded to see before him Marie, Go Everywhere Woman, ablaze with concentrated passion, pouring forth a torrent of execration.

Singing Bird cried out, cowered from the lash of words, and ran into the timber. Carson, taken aback, stood in the blistering fury of Shunan's daughter, now turned upon him full force.

"So you do not come to me, but make love, sit under a blanket with that girl! You fool, she is for Captain Shunan, not for you. He takes her tomorrow. You look at me, you hear me, and then you throw me away for a common Arapahoe squaw? But for me your scalp would be at a Blackfoot belt! You saw me dance, and you dare to shame me! Am I worth nothing? That slut is promised; you cannot get her. Touch her again, and my father will whip you like a dog!"

She paused, flushed and choked; for a moment she softened, then glowed afresh.

"I am angry with you, yes! But it is not too late. Come with me, and we'll talk."

Carson, putting up his knife, laughed shortly. It was his first meeting with jealousy. He knew now that his half-thought had been right all along. This girl-woman meant to have him, had gone far to snare him. Love? Bah!

"I've heard enough," he said. "Your father whip me? I'll dance Sun Buffalo's scalp if he stands in my trail. As for you, I want no she-devil in my lodge. That's all."

A flush darkened her golden skin. Her eyes blazed again; then the blaze died. A mocking, cruel smile touched her lips.

"So you do not want me?" she said, eying him aslant. "And you dare to tell me so to my face? Well, maybe you'll not want that other one, either—"

Carson heard a smothered cry, a scuffle, a scurry in the timber. Comprehension drove into him. He whirled and bolted for the sounds, rabid with fury.

Where the brush swayed and crackled, he came upon Shunan, face crimsoned with lusty mirth, clawing at the Arapahoe girl, lifting her in his arms, while she bit and struck, unable to reach her knife.

Carson was in on them like a thunderbolt. No time to pluck blade from sheath, no time even to think of his knife; his red rage was too blind for that. He hurled himself upon the pair. His fist hammered into the wide, astonished, flaming visage. Then, while Singing Bird squirmed loose and went darting away, Carson had locked his fingers in the huge red beard.

A scream burst from Shunan, a scream of fury and agony mingled. Those iron hands ripped his beard like sheepskin, flung it into his face, caught and wrenched and ripped it by the roots afresh. He staggered, groaning, wiped blood from his chin, caught hold of a tree and stood glaring at Carson. Then, suddenly, he bent and came up with his fusil.

"I hear Leetle Chief sing his death-song," he rasped, and murder was in his eyes. Carson, knife out now, gathered to spring, but another was before him. Marie was leaping in and thrusting the fusil aside, crying out shrilly:

"He has no rifle! They will say you murdered him—"

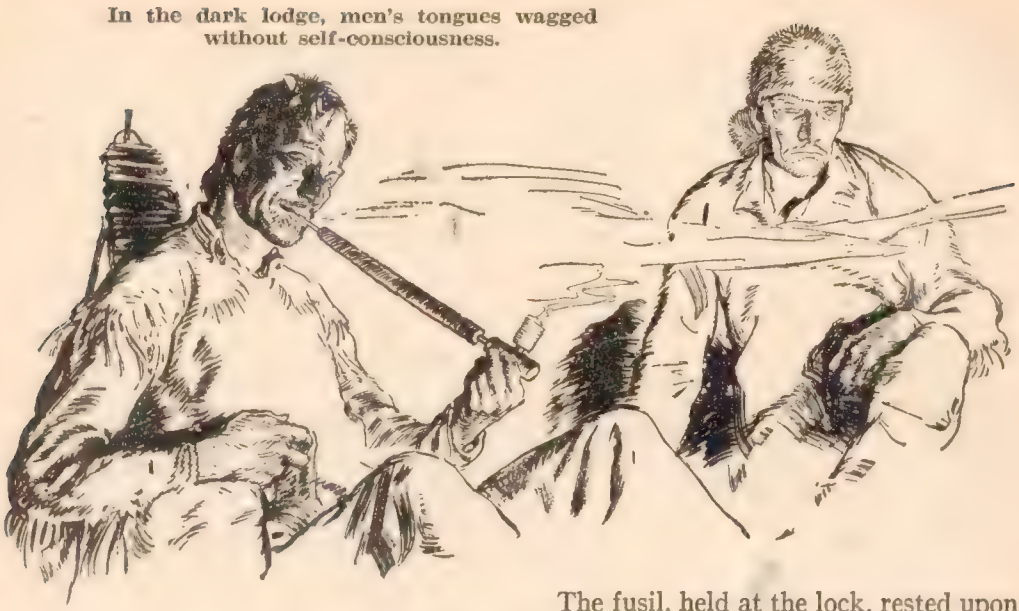
Shunan snarled an oath, then drew back.

"You are leetle man," he panted. "If I keel you with knife, if I shoot you now, bah! They say big man killed leetle man. Get your rifle, and tomorrow I will marry that leetle squaw while you are on the ghost trail."

Carson nodded. "My rifle's in camp for mending. I'll find another gun. Meet me there in five minutes, and you'll lose more hair yet."

"With pleasure, you damned American! *Nom de chien!* On the way I'll cut a stick to whip you into the bushes. At the big camp. Come quick!"

SHUNAN turned—was gone. Carson ran to where he had tied his horse. He seized the rein and was already astride when a shrill voice reached him.



In the dark lodge, men's tongues wagged without self-consciousness.

He saw Singing Bird running toward him from her lodge, and he checked the first jump of his horse, swung around to meet her.

"Your gun, where?" she panted at him. "Here! Now go kill him!"

She held up something—it was the dragoon pistol he had given Sights the Enemy last year. He laughed suddenly and swung it out of her grasp.

"Loaded today," she cried. "Fresh powder."

Shunan had already gone dashing for camp. Carson sent his horse hammering after. He regretted the broken spring of his rifle. He should have put in another, but had neglected it. He looked down at the pistol, primed and ready. He cocked it as he rose in the saddle. Shunan had lived too long already.

Now the main camp was outspread. Shunan was there, in the clear, circling, prancing, bragging. Carson saw only that figure, and raced for it. Men were running about, shouting, but he saw them not. The thought of Singing Bird in those brute hands drove him to meet the man halfway and better, drove him with prickle of blind fury and a growl in his throat.

Shunan had wheeled and was coming. Carson watched him, guessed at his every motion, waited to answer fusil ball with pistol bullet. The two animals bore in direct, head on, until their fore-hoofs plunged frantically with spurt of dust. Noses touching, the horses came to dead halt. There was an instant of poised inaction.

The fusil, held at the lock, rested upon Shunan's right thigh, reins in left hand. The man's face was curious—muddily flushed, childishly ferocious, touched with blood and sweat, reddened eyes twitching. The eyes were gripped to the heavy pistol, as though fascinated.

"Pull off!" snapped Carson. "Loose your lead before I kill you."

"*Non!*" began Shunan. "*Non!* Let us talk—"

Cunning as a cornered wolf, he reared his horse. Then his fusil gushed smoke and roared in Carson's very face. Carson, swerving, felt his own arm jar to the recoil of his pistol. The reports blended. And with the explosion, Carson's head rocked with searing impact of flame and bullet.

His horse, frightened, leaped away. He was blinded. He could hear Shunan raving and bleating oaths, but he could only sway blindly in the saddle. Blood and a flap of skin clouded his sight; his skin and eyes felt afire. Then his horse halted as hands caught at rein and mane, other steadying hands clutched at him.

"Did I throw him? Where's another gun?" Carson heard his own voice, but dimly.

"You bored him twice through the arm with one ball!" yelled somebody. "He's got enough. Listen to him holler!"

"No more now! Another time—my arm is gone," came from somewhere, in Shunan's accents. Then Carson heard Bridger's voice at his ear.

"Save your powder for a dead aim. You're half scalped. He's a trifle sp'iled, but he'll keep for next time. Come on, get down."

Other voices came, Herring's, Laforay's. He slid from the horse with groping moccasins. Friendly arms in buckskin guided him to a seat in the shade. By the sounds of threat, jeers, oaths, in English and French, only the swift defeat of Shunan had averted an encounter between Americans and Hudson's Bay men. Carson heard some one say that Shunan had been taken away.

Then another voice, cool, deep, different. A strange voice, educated, using high-faluting language and proper words, the way army men did: Whitman, the doctor of whom Bridger had spoken.

Carson sat silent, listening. His quick swerve had shunted the fusil ball around the skull above the eyes, almost to the ear. The skin was furrowed to the bone and blued from the powder-grains that had stung his eyes and blinded him. No great damage after all, but for the moment a nasty wound.

USING his ears since he could not use his eyes, Carson drank in the voices all around. This missionary doctor was a good man, swift and steady of finger and touch, hearty of voice. The other one was yonder—the pious bleating kind, standing with flannel mouth full of brotherly love, peace, good-will.

Carson set his teeth and choked down an oath. *Sop, sop, stitch, stitch, pick, pick;* then at last the cooling water, a bandage swathing eyes and forehead.

"You'll do, my man." That was the doctor's voice. "Keep it moist with cold water till I look at it again. You had a narrow escape there."

"I'll have his scalp on a drying-hoop yet," said Carson. "If I don't get him, the 'Rapahoes will. How long before I can see?"

"Not long. What was the quarrel?"

"I caught him trying to carry off an Injun girl. She couldn't reach her knife. But there are other accounts to close with him."

"You'll wait till his arm is healed?"

"Wait? I'll kill him on sight, soon's I can see."

"Then I wouldn't forward your business any by attending to him."

"You won't find him, Doc." It was Bridger intervening. "He's taken trail. The 'Rapahoes would skin him alive. That whole Hudson's Bay camp had better pull stakes, else there'll be hell on a hot griddle."

"Then I must get over there at once and learn when Captain McKay is leaving for the west," said Whitman incisively. "My companion is going with his party, continuing on into western Oregon. I'm turning back for the East myself."

Bridger chuckled. "To fetch out women, by your tell, huh?"

"To prove that Americans with their families can travel the trail into Oregon. Millions of acres of land given up to fur hunters, traders, uncivilized Indians!" The voice of Whitman drove into the blinded Carson—a forceful, vigorous, manly voice. "To make this an American settlers' trail, until all the country is taken for the United States. The Indians, and the British claims to occupancy by dint of wandering hunters and trading-posts—these must yield to farms and settlements, to a permanent civilization."

"Strong medicine," muttered Carson. Bridger guffawed again.

"White women acrost the mountains? Can't be done, Doc. They'd never git halfway. That's a crazier dream than I ever heard tell yet. Only American powder and lead will ever hold this country, either side the mountains, ag'in' Injuns and them Britishers. It's fur country and squaw country, where white women can't shine. They aint got the know-how."

"I'm afraid you don't know much about them, Bridger."

"Yeah? Well, I know Injuns. I warn ye, you're liable to run into the biggest Injun war since Tippecanoe! Well, that's my talk. Better come along to my lodge and take it easy, Kit. Doc, what do we owe you?"

Whitman laughed easily. "Nothing, of course—except apologies to the women you'll find at rendezvous next summer."

Jim Bridger snorted like the old warhorse he was, and led Carson off.

"WELL, what's the sign?" demanded Bridger. "Did you git the bale—or do you?"

"McKay promised he'd get it from Plenty Eagle."

"And then what?"

"He'll turn it over to me," Carson said reluctantly. "But I may have to trap with him this season."

"So that's the way the stick floats!" Bridger growled an oath. "If that bale's opened 'fore it gits to you, the mountains will be full o' baldheads next year. Anyhow, we'll be breaking camp soon now."

"Where do you aim to trap, Jim?"

"Depends. Not with no Britishers, anyhow."

Blind now, temporarily, the cool quiet of the lodge, the soft couch of buffalo robes, wooed the impatient Carson to accept destiny.

Men talked around him, and as the days passed, as his hot blood cooled, as he sat silent and unobserved in a corner, queer things grew up around him. With lack of sight, his senses were more acute, his perceptions quickened. Words around him, words in the dark lodge, men's tongues wagging without the restraint of sunlight and self-consciousness.

Marcus Whitman came, fervid and eloquent, missioner and doctor and patriot; but his larger visions fell away from these others. Rough mountain men, scouts, bitter-hard men. Often, as they talked, Carson's memory went back to that day when he and Laforay and Rube Herring had smoked together and he had won an insight into their lives and hopes.

SO now, and most strangely; perhaps Whitman's words had stirred something alive in them. The ruthless efficiency which Carson admired was stripped away. They talked to one another of days back East, of families, of sweethearts left, of harsh little practical details—butchering hogs, milking cows, curing hay: Things forgotten on the trail this long while. Old times. . . .

Drunk, many of them were. Reynolds, a hard and bitter man, came one day in liquor and wept over his medicine-bag; it held his mother's wedding-ring, he said, and told how a girl had married some one else and spurned his ring, and how he had come West. He would have knifed any man who reminded him of his own words, later; but none did.

No. They could not grasp Whitman's visionary talk about patriotism and uplift and Christ. The Great Spirit was far closer to them and more practical, more comprehensible. It was fitted to everything around them; they absorbed it unconsciously as part of this entire scheme of things which they had taken over in this chosen field of work. Theology was over their heads. The Great Spirit was always close.

All the while, Carson listened and said little, but these things went deeply into him. Whitman's coming, his inspired words, had caused this break in the hard everyday efficiency of them all; a rare thing, yet it had happened before. Carson was understanding it for the first time, that was all. Flung into the world as a child, hungry-hearted, to live a man's life, he too had learned an iron efficiency that crushed down all softer things. Yet they were still within him.

He perceived now that these men he emulated, patterned on, competed with and beat at their own chosen game—after all, they were partly children. More stoic than the Indians, each one still had his own griefs and petty worries and cherished aims in life. Many a one drank to forget, and lived to forget, and blasphemed all life to forget—such men as Shunan, who had once been a great man in the world.

One night a Hudson's Bay man came visiting, a Scot breed, and got to singing old Scotch songs in a dreary voice and queerly mangled words. Somebody found a forgotten comb. Bridger stretched paper over it and wheezed out tunes, and everybody cackled scraps of lilting words, homely backwoods songs that wakened in their hearts old days in another world.

And mostly the talk was of women. This woman, that woman; some good, some bad, as the speaker's heart inclined. White women, a thousand miles away. Things were said, but not to be mentioned afterward; the bars of reserve were momentarily down, the past was revealed, the secret things of the heart were awkwardly laid bare.

Carson, who had no past to stir him and who was building wholly on the fu-

ture, thought often of Reynolds and the old wedding-ring in the bitter man's medicine-sack. It was symbolic of all these men, he mused. To open the medicine-bag was forbidden. That would be ill luck; the medicine would turn bad. Yet each of them had his own medicine-bag, and many a one in the dark night was wet with tears which in daylight would be denied with scathing oaths.

From the missioners, or from his own wakening comprehension of things, Carson got one definite item that lingered with him, most queerly. He went, with everyone else, gawking and wondering and abashed, to a divine service the two men held. They repeated the single prayer that he knew, a vague babble of words drifting up from childish memories, an almost meaningless thing.

Then, suddenly, Marcus Whitman said it again before them all, said it in a new way. Carson felt his mental eyes opened to a flash of comprehension as the deep, deliberate words reached into him with actual meaning:

"Our Father, which art in Thy heaven all around us, may we keep Thy name holy; Thy kingdom come into our hearts and grow there; Thy will be done by us on earth as it is done by the saints in heaven; give us this day our daily bread, both for the body and for the spirit; forgive us our trespasses against Thee, according as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us away from all temptation, protecting us ever against the Evil One. Amen."

That was all. Carson was led away to the quiet lodge again; and brooding there over the next day or two, felt the flash of understanding slip away from him by degrees. "Thy heaven all around us"—this phrase lingered with him. He kept this. It was something he could grasp. It was the Indian concept of the Great Spirit everywhere, immanent in all things. Religion enough for any man, he reflected; and if he forgot the actual words of the rest, the flash remained in his memory, a thing secret but definite.

He felt that he was growing, in these dark days, somehow finding himself slowly, and he wondered at it all.

CHAPTER VIII

CARSON'S powder-burned eyes were clearing at last.

The ache in the head was gone; the rip in the skin had closed. Whitman nipped out the stitches, promising that the bandage would be off in another day or two. So would he and the other missioner, for the rendezvous was about to break up.

The Hudson's Bay brigade, in their own camp, were getting ready to strike their lodges. By all report, Shunan and his daughter had taken to safe hiding, and it was well they had. The Arapahoes were in ugly mood, searching vainly for him, and their old hatred against the Blackfeet was intensified by what had happened.

THUS far, no word had come from the bale of beaver pelts. But to Carson, still lodged with Jim Bridger, the usual patience had returned, the calm poise that matched him so well with these older and grizzled veterans. Mistakes come easily to all men, but on the beaver trail they could bear no repetition.

Early morning: Bridger was up and about,—even before his squaw arose,—growling like a bear with a sore head. He stepped out of the lodge. The camp lay in silence. Carson heard his oaths; then he came in again with another waft of fresh air and a splutter of wrath.

"By the 'tarnal, Kit! Looks like your pack's been opened. Here's sign."

"What?" Carson started up, cursing the eyes that held him in check.

"A red-painted arrer—Blackfoot, with eagle-feathers. Some sneaking polecat planted it before the lodge. Hell's loose, I reckon."

"A defi," said Carson despondently. "Takes no eyes to read that sign."

"Yep. War-point and war-paint. Feathered, as sign of Plenty Eagle himself, huh? He's got holt of that there medicine pelt; now it'll be passed around. He sends notice we're to be rubbed out. That's how I read it."

"Maybe right, maybe not," said Carson, perplexity tugging at him. "My bale wasn't to be touched. McKay's word always holds good. I'll ride over and ask him a few things, Jim. I can see well enough to ride straight and talk straight."

"After breakfast, then," agreed Bridger. "I'll tell the boys about this; we'll hold council 'fore we take the trail."

The camp awakened slowly. Carson fidgeted, while the squaw prepared breakfast. This arrow was from Plenty Eagle, of course; but its meaning was not clear —was not intended to be clear, perhaps, until later. If Bridger had read it aright, then hell was loose and no mistake.

All was ready at last. They were shoveling in the buffalo stew, when quick hoofs came to a halt before the lodge entrance. Then came the thud of lightly descending moccasins. Carson sensed a figure at the open flap, and heard Bridger's grunt of inquiry, then reply.

"M'sieur Keet Carson is here?"

"Aye. What is it?"

"M'sieur, I am from the camp of Captain McKay. I bring the bale of beaver which you seek, with the Captain's compliments. He regrets that he was so long getting it for you. He is about to march; the lodges are struck. He wishes to know, shall I leave the bale here, and when may he expect you to join him?"

A French 'breed, by the voice and the polite words. Bridger leaped up.

"By God, now to find out, or else why was peepers made?" he exploded, and went out of the lodge hurriedly. Carson spoke with the messenger, asked him to wait outside until he had consulted with his friend. The 'breed complied.

Bridger came stamping back, lugging the bale of pelts. He made sign to the squaw: "Get out!" He dropped the bale, closed the lodge flap, then squatted and began to work at the lashings.

Carson, blinking with eyes and heart on fire, thrust his bandage higher to give him some vision. Bridger was slipping off the lashings. Now he unpeeled the hide wrappings of the bale, and dug at the layers of pelts.

"Where is it?" he growled. "Where to find it?"

"Plumb in the middle," said Carson excitedly. "Folded away to cache there out o' sight."

A moment of stark suspense. Then Bridger caught his breath.

"Aye, by God! Scalp me if it aint—"

He fumbled, made fast, gave final determined jerk and tug. It came free, before their eyes, white of skin and furry edges, glamorous with its suggestion here in the dimmed light of the closed lodge. Carson's gasp of relief was answered by an astonished and incredulous grunt from Bridger, who unfolded the thing. There was the fur, spread and matted, white as the wool of a sheep.

EMPIRE in hand again, and bloody conquest hobbled!

Both of them forgot all else—Carson, in thus seeing once more the wondrous thing destiny had flung into his hand; Bridger, in his first sight of a marvel whose very existence he would have derided. Not the thing alone, but all it stood for—the stupendous, far-reaching events hanging upon this scrap of fur.

"It's real—damn' if it aint!"

With the whisper, Bridger lifted bloodshot eyes to Carson, staring.

"Real!" He rubbed the fur, still incredulous. A slow grin stole into his tanned leather face. "Ho! And him sending it back to you, unbeknowing! And Plenty Eagle having it and never guessing. Kit, damn' if your medicine aint strong! Stronger'n all git-out!"

Stupefaction died slowly, closed their senses to caution. Bridger's head came up of a sudden; his hand shot out to pull the white pelt out of sight. Too late!

For without ceremony the entrance flap was flung aside, and a panting figure stood framed there. Not that of the Hudson's Bay 'breed, but of an Indian naked to the waist: Brave Elk, the young Arapahoe warrior.

The eyes in the smooth round face caught the white pelt ere it was whisked from sight. Then the warrior spoke, from dry heaving throat.

"Little Chief! She is gone."

"Who?" Carson strained to see. "Who is gone?"

"Singing Bird. She is gone to Plenty Eagle of the Blackfeet!"

Carson leaped up. "What? To marry him?"

"For his lodge, yes; but she was taken away, carried off through the brush at first daylight."

Bridger exploded: "Hey! By God, that's the arrer sign, Kit!"

CARSON, rising, jerked the bandage loose and flung it away. With it he flung restraint, all thought of half-healed wound, or of bale or pelt. He snatched his rifle, mended now, and his "fixin's."

"I'll go with you," he said to Brave Elk. "You have a horse? Mine's close."

"Hey, Kit!" cried Bridger hastily. "Here's your bale. What say to McKay?"

"Tell the 'breed to wait," flung Carson over his shoulder, and then was out, gone, running beside the stripped warrior.

A vault to horse, a twist of rope, and he was away, galloping on beside the Arapahoe. He flung a sharp question at the young brave.

"She went for water while the morning star was bright. She did not come back. We found sign in the woods, moccasin sign and horses, a piece of Blackfoot rope. The trail ran away from us.

Shunan and that girl of his brought the Blackfeet thieves. You are to blame."

"I?" Carson started at the accusation. "How so?"

"You shoot crooked. You should have killed him. They say he has gone to the Snake, to hide in the fort there. His daughter gone too: you made her jealous; she was angry." Brave Elk was waxing voluble under his own rage. "You had no business sitting under a blanket with Singing Bird. She was not for you. She is not for Shunan. Now she is mine. I go to find Shunan and take his scalp."

"You'd better start in with a few Blackfeet braids."

Brave Elk snarled: "I do what you did not do. Your talk is big; your heart is small. I saw White Beaver medicine in the lodge where you live. When Sights the Enemy hears about that, he'll take it, and Plenty Eagle will listen to him."

And with this Parthian shaft, Brave Elk slashed down quirt and sent his pony racing ahead. Carson grunted with dismay. The fat was in the fire now, and no mistake!

THE Arapahoe camp was in wild confusion. Imprecations and black looks greeted him on every side. When he dismounted at Sights the Enemy's lodge, he found Brave Elk before him, story told. Warriors were gathering with mutters to right and left, stern faces, piercing eyes. The air was electric, surcharged, tense.

"You dirtied my pistol for no good!" spoke out Sights the Enemy angrily. "What will you do now to get my daughter back? Shunan is far away; he must not have her. She is not for that dog Plenty Eagle. You have what he wants more than any woman. Give it up! Little Chief has the White Beaver medicine. Brave Elk saw it in his lodge. Give it up!"

"You made a little thing of the pistol once," Carson countered. "Now you ask me to set a fire for blood to put out."

"No matter. The white beaver did not come to the Blackfeet; it came to you. The sign is bad." The thin, grim lips curved in a sneer. "Let the Blackfeet have it. Who cares? Or do you think to go to the lodge of Plenty Eagle and take the girl away with you?"

Carson smiled coolly.

"Once the Arapahoe men were warriors. Are they squaws now, to let the Blackfeet steal away their girls? Or will they go to Plenty Eagle's lodge themselves?"

Sights the Enemy was quick. That taunt drove deep and far. Carson found himself caught and held in sinewy grip, while a circling press of Arapahoes bore in around him.

It was serious now. He fought for words; he strained against the hard arms; the hot threat was breathed in his face:

"You stay here until she is brought back. If she is harmed, the Americans will get you in little pieces."

Carson relaxed altogether.

"Loose me. Do it quickly."

"Then send for the white beaver skin."

His answer was vigorous, unexpected. A sharp writhe, quick thrust with knee and palm, and he tore himself free.

Now he was bursting through the circle, receiving blows and curses, returning them full measure. Impetus carried him on and through. He broke clear, ran for his horse, and with one leap was mounted. His rifle was unloaded as yet, but they did not know it. He half turned to rear, sweeping the arc of yapping pursuit.

A gun exploded, then another; but those following him desisted. A few balls whistled past him, and then peril was behind. Safely in the clear, he pulled down and went cantering back. The Arapahoes would cool off, but at the moment they were plenty hostile, and ripe for anything.

HE rode for the main camp of the rendezvous again, and found it all astir. The messenger from McKay was waiting, seated in the shade a short distance from the lodge. Carson dismounted, aware that his own close call had passed unobserved. Bridger was in high good humor.

"Guns, hey? Hell's popping like blisters on a roast beaver-tail, sounds like. So Plenty Eagle has your gal, hey? Whose work?"

"Don't know; Shunan's, most like, or his daughter's. The 'Rapahoe blame me. I was grabbed and had to fight clear. Left 'em buzzing."

"So? That's bad," said Bridger. "Spark in tinder. You can easy catch another squaw, but you'll lose face. Pity you didn't fire first and kill that Frenchie. Now what? Join McKay to the Snake, fetch back Shunan's hair as peace-offering? Your bale is tied up again. What's the sign?"

Carson's thoughts raced. To keep the bargain with McKay and take the vengeance trail westward? Brave Elk, and

other Arapahoes, would be on that trail; but with McKay he could beat them all. But meantime, Singing Bird was held by the Blackfeet, no doubt held for Shunan.

Confusion beat at him. But the white beaver pelt—what was the answer to that? Might be better to give it up after all, trade it for Singing Bird. Plenty Eagle would give her and a hundred more to get his hands on it. After all, the Blackfeet could be no more hostile than they were already. The Arapahoe pronounced the white pelt bad medicine. Indian reasoning, that might spread far.

"Your arrer's gone."

"Eh?" Carson turned to Bridger. "My arrow?"

"Yep. You can bet on that. Arrer wasn't meant for me. Plenty Eagle has got the gal; the arrer says for you to come in war and look for her. That's the plain reading of it, clear as moccasin track in the sun."

"What d'you mean, it's gone?"

Bridger chuckled delightedly. "I sent it back to him by a runner, with a gift that'll sour his belly."

Carson started. "Not the pelt?"

"Hell, no. Just a snip from it tied to the arrer. I'll pay you for the rest of it. We held council whilst you was gone."

"Yes?" Carson tensed.

"Fill powder-horns and bullet-pouches, march north'ard at noon, set traps in Blackfoot country and be damned to 'em. I pack the medicine along with my possibles. If them imps want it, they know where to find it. We're nigh a hundred of us, and we'll make their hearts weak."

North! Challenge! A hundred of them, straight into the Blackfoot country, to trap the streams there!

Carson swung aroung to the Hudson's Bay 'breed.

"Here!" He pointed to the wrapped bale. "You can take this back to Captain McKay. Tell him it will wipe out my account with him; it is his, with my thanks. I'm trapping with Captain Bridger."

"Hurray!" blared Bridger. "By God, I reckoned so, Kit! All the Blackfeet this side of hell can't stop us. What do you need for outfit?"

"Everything. Traps, powder and lead, and Plenty Eagle in line with my sights."

Bridger clapped him on the back.

"Might git you that! We aim to burn the devil with fire, and them Blackfeet will be thick as fleas on an Injun dog. Hello, here's Laforay."

The Iroquois 'breed came padding up, grinning widely.

"How, Kit! You not go with Hudson's Bay?"

"No. And you?"

"By damn, no! Me and Herring, we follow the medicine. A dream show me red sky again, heap fight; but everything turn out good, plenty scalp. Hey, remember? I dream true. I see you once with scalp bloody, Kit!"

A yell sounded. Other men were coming on the run. Bridger whirled around. Arapahoes, a group of them, were coming on the gallop, quirts at work.

"Look out for trouble!" Bridger grabbed for his rifle. Other trappers were streaming along, weapons ready. The Arapahoe warriors held straight in. They were armed and painted for war. Bridger strode out and fronted them.

"Well? What do you want here?"

Sights the Enemy made blunt answer.

"We have come for the medicine-beaver belt. With it we will buy from the Blackfeet the girl your man lost us."

Bridger glanced at Carson in swift consternation.

"That's their dicker," Carson explained. "Brave Elk saw it. They wanted to keep me as hostage. I cut clear."

Bridger swung around again to the Arapahoe group.

"Go home. The medicine is ours. We take it to the Blackfeet ourselves."

"Maybe you lie; we shall see," came the bold response. "Singing Bird comes back, or it is war. You pay for what your man did. Let him answer quick!"

Carson stepped out.

"Aye. Your hearts have turned to water. You come to us like whining puppies. We go to the Blackfeet with rifles. Plenty Eagle's scalp pays."

"You speak crooked like you shoot," yapped a warrior; and with defiant yells the Arapahoe turned and hammered away.

At noon the Bridger brigade marched forth, with the medicine pelt stowed among Bridger's odds and ends, his "possibles" of camp and trail. And powder-horns were crammed full.

CHAPTER IX

CAMP, now—camp, and traps out, short trail, eye alert, pelts to stretch.

Here was the country of beaver, of hostile shaft and bullet, of chance taken for prime fur. Year by year the moun-

Bridger rubbed the fur, incredulously. "Plenty Eagle having it, and never guessing! Kit—" His hand shot out to pull the white pelt out of sight. But too late!

tain men were pressing forward, past exhausted streams and valleys where the greenhorns might cull the last beaver, on into the country where no others dared risk hair.

Beaver were the first-fruits, but the beaver would change and go, as the bison herds had changed ground. Here, for the moment, was adventure of life, with risky zestful horizons beckoning on.

Carson visioned all this, and more. Other men visioned it. Often and often, the talk about the evening campfires fell upon this vast country and its morrow: forts, perhaps, trade coming in, who knew what? These men had seen tremendous changes even in the past ten years: Indian tribes shifting ground, discoveries made, hunting and trapping grounds changed. Even now things were changing swiftly down in Texas, adventurers pouring in from the States, a fight being waged to throw out the Mexicans.

"By damn, Bridger," gammed one old sturdy trapper, "remember when everybody haw-hawed when you told about the Yellerstone? You bet! I wisht I could be alive hereabouts twenty years from now! Just to see things."

"Won't be nothin' to see." The bitter Reynolds spat into the fire. "Beaver gone. Nothin' to bring anybody. Injuns moved. No more fighting; nothing to fight over. Missioners like that feller Whitman moving in. Injuns gettin' tame, like them Delawares that does the Santy Fe freighting and hunting. Hell! Who'd want to be around here then?"

"That's right," agreed another. "My pap knowed Colonel Dan'l Boone right well, back in Missouri. I seen him when I was a younker. Pore old feller, cheated and robbed and still hanging on. Damn the Gov'ment! When the settlements

move in, the sharks come. We'd ought to keep all settlements out. Us mountain men could do it."

So ran talk and speculation; but first, the limitless sweep of country to be won. And for the moment, adventure enough on all sides, swamping idle talk with hard practical conditions to be met. The brigade had been told off into trapping parties. Later, the agreed muster of the various detachments was to be the Yellowstone, on up north.

HERE were the men of Bridger's detachment in central camp, when one day Laforay and Rube Herring came into camp from the morning trap-round, with big news.

"Blackfeet gettin' damn' bad." From the saddle, Laforay flung a beaver pelt for the camp squaws to dress. He dismounted and grinned, lips shaggy, gums nearly toothless. "Half the traps be sprung, no hair left. Rube nigh lost his, though."

Herring, swinging to earth, nodded to Bridger and the others.

"Hull pack of the screeching devils whipped arrers at me from a patch o' bresh. One took my hat off; another cut my shirt—looky here! I got my hat, downed one hostile, made a straight shirt-tail for my hoss, and lit out to join Laforay. But that aint all!" And Herring emitted a torrent of hearty curses. "We failed of a clean shot at the Old Nick himself: Plenty Eagle, in the flesh."

"Sure it's him?" questioned Jim Bridger shrewdly. "I knowed that snip o' white fur would give him the itch. Maybe it wa'n't him, though."

"Seen him plain in the open, at dead range," Herring said wrathfully. "My sights lay dead center, too; the gun only flashed the pan. Laforay slipped his ball and drew a blank. Then we had to run again. Damnation! Fresh priming, and a gun that never played false afore now!"

"Me, I'm not un'erstand, neither. Sartin aim but no score." Laforay wrinkled up his face, shook his head, and spoke solemnly. "Medicine work, sure. Next time I try him with cross-marked bullet."

"Huh!" exclaimed Carson, tapping out his pipe. "I've got lead that'll fetch his death-yell."

"Good God, I wish I'd never left Ohio!" This was young Stephens, startled by this talk of close escapes, by the obvious belief of these men in rank wizardry. "What a country this is! I can feel an arrow in my back every step I take outside of camp. I'll never see my home folks again."

Some of the men laughed. Bridger, with keenly appraising glance, spat and said nothing. The boy was pallid, shaken, in a nervous funk.

"You'll live till your time comes," said Carson, essaying cold comfort. "If it's due to come here in the mountains, that's the how of it, and not to be dodged. Until then, you're as safe here as in Ohio."

"Well, the Injuns aint stealing traps; that's one p'int to the good," Bridger observed. "They know now the ketch has been made. They're out for hair. I reckon we'll up traps tomorrow, and cross over to the next beaver water."

Up traps it was, then, and no objections. . . .

With the morrow, Carson rode forth: he and young Stephens, Laforay and Herring, in company a little way. At a fork of the stream they separated. Men hunted only in pairs these days.

"See you in camp, Laforay," said Carson.

"Maybe so." The eyes of the Iroquois clouded. Then they opened wide as he puckered up his wrinkled face, groping for a brief vision that had departed. "Damn! I don't see it now, but it was a lake. Just now, when Kit say we see each other, there come a fine lake. Something going to happen pretty quick, I tell you! A lake, a big pond, for sure!"

Carson grunted and rode on with his companion Stephens.

THE inflowing fork again divided. A tributary issued from a rock-walled cañon, whose lower benches were sparsely grown to shrub alders and willows; it pocketed limpid pools and much beaver sign. Up there were the last of Carson's traps; those of Stephens had been placed on along the main stream, meandering through the willow-channeled valley.

"Suppose you come with me," Carson said. "Then we'll run yours. Eh?"

Stephens laughed. "Nonsense, Kit! I'm all over my scare now. No Indians around here. Anyhow, you were right; when the time comes, it's not to be dodged. We've neither of us far to go. You've not seen anything suspicious?"

"Nary a sign."

"Then you finish your traps, and I'll finish mine. We'll meet here."

They were in the saddle, for in this country a man did not long leave his horse. Carson squinted up the lush val-

ley, and bade his animal senses make report. Threaded by the lazy stream, green-bordered, all the place was peaceful as the cloud-fluff drifting in the blue above. There was not far to go. The boy had found himself, was high-spirited, and should be let prove himself. One learned confidence only by the taking of chances; and life hereabouts was a succession of chances, come good, come ill. Carson nodded as decision quickened.

"Right, then. We'll meet here, and back to camp together. Use eyes and ears, and mind your loaded gun. The waiting ball is what the Injun fears."

STEPHENS rode on, gayly challenging adventure. Carson, watching, saw him rounding the closer bend of the stream, saw him signal with reassuring hand, gallantly swing in for the streambed and the waiting trap. All the landscape likewise signaled of peace. Carson urged his horse aslant.

Two traps waited, one about the middle of the cañon, one at the upper end. Carson reached the gateway of tumbled rock masses, and turned into the cañon, riding along the broken bottoms where his horse's hoofs clinked on granite outcrops. Here was scant cover for any enemy. The shelving rock slopes were bare; the rampart rim above was naked. Carson's ears were sharpened for the least scuff of moccasins, stealthy skin or sliding pebble, but every sense told him he was alone. . . .

Yet, possibly, not alone. A breeze blew in errant whiffs. It picked up scuds of dust and powdery sand, setting them awhirl in madly eddying dance. Indians said these sand- and dust-devils were the ghosts of dead warriors making medicine. Carson eyed the dancing eddies sourly; something eerie about them, yes! He could see half a dozen, here and there along the cañon. They meant change of weather to his eyes, either dry hot or stormy wet.

So his wary caution was lulled. He found the first trap empty; finished here, he rode on for the other at the head of the cañon. Then he halted, startled. His eye caught a glint of white on the planted pole from which the chain led into the water. Anything new, anything out of ordinary, in this hostile country was sign of danger.

All animal again, he listened, squinted, sniffed. The glint of white beckoned him. With rifle cocked, he went on. This thing was not a bait. He was bound for his trap in any event; therefore it could be no lure to curiosity. So he came up to it, and found it a ragged scrap of paper, fastened about the pole by a tied buckskin thong.

Carson slipped off the string, opened the paper, read the penciled scrawl:

Some day again, M. Kit—maybe soon. I look for you. The little squaw is good medicine. —*Shunan.*

When he had deciphered it, Carson grunted, scanned the empty reaches of the cañon. So Shunan was not on the Snake, but here with the Blackfeet! The insolence of the words sang in his blood. A red beard, a red scalp, against the near horizon. Good! The sooner the better!

He contemptuously tore the paper to fragments, shredded them on the air. Then he dismounted and went about his work. He followed the chain down into the water, stooped for it—came erect with spine stiffening and senses galvanized. What now?

A distant, far-off shot, and another. A medley of Indian yells. He could read attack, pursuit. More whoops, lifting from the cañon entrance, joyous and significant. Young Stephens had been jumped, was making a stand, was at bay.

WITH a leap, Carson was on his horse, wheeling the animal and heading down-cañon. He made speed, but kept the beast in hand. A voice came up between the cañon walls, thin and yet carrying distinctly enough: *"Kit! Here —quick!"*

He pounded on, then tightened rein suddenly. A horse, at maddened gallop, with clang of hoofs and plash of water —a riderless horse, passing him with stirrups a-toss and saddle bloody. It was Stephens' horse.

On again, with rifle ready, but now the clamor had lulled and stilled. This ride had taken time. Sounds carried fast and far along those rocky walls. All were gone now. Carson rode on into an ominous silence.

Nearing the cañon mouth, Carson checked pace, so that his eyes might report on what lay ahead. He saw nothing, heard nothing, until he did emerge at a cautious canter. And then, once outside the barrier, he heard and saw.

Yells burst up in exultant chorus. A score of dark forms flitted out, with gun and arrow leveled. All this in the glimpse of a flashing instant. In such a

moment, man thinks fast. Carson saw himself flanked, the trail ahead closed to him, all retreat to camp cut off. Run the gantlet and leave young Stephens? No sign of the boy, but his voice had made sign enough.

With the mental query, with the ringing whoops, as his horse shied and reared, Carson was already in action. He let the horse go, slipped out of the saddle, and was in among the tumbled rocks that littered the cañon mouth. Guns banged; bows twanged; but the spatter of lead and arrow came too late.

Carson peered forth, unhurried, holding his fire. He was in a stout fortress, with rifle loaded. A dust-devil danced and eddied, died down an sprang up again, whirled and gyrated and was gone. Carson glanced around. The higher ground behind commanded his position, but he had forted well; only a lucky ball or shaft would droop his flag. "Life's a fight, Kit!" old Bent had said to him—and had spoken true: here it came again.

Meantime, Stephens might break away for the camp, being less important game in redskin eyes. But what of Stephens? No sign of him anywhere. As Carson squinted in search, he realized that the Blackfeet had scattered for shelter from his rifle, and had fallen back. A yell pealed up; an arm appeared, shaking something—a scalp, still bloody. Other yells joined in, gleeful and promising him the same end. Carson smothered an oath. So the boy was dead, his hair a trophy!

A figure appeared, stalking forth from cover. There, by the gods, stood Plenty Eagle himself, straight in his moccasins, bare to the waist, feather in scalp-lock—a ready mark for rifle-ball! His voice lifted, while Carson's trigger-finger itched.

"Little Chief! Come out."

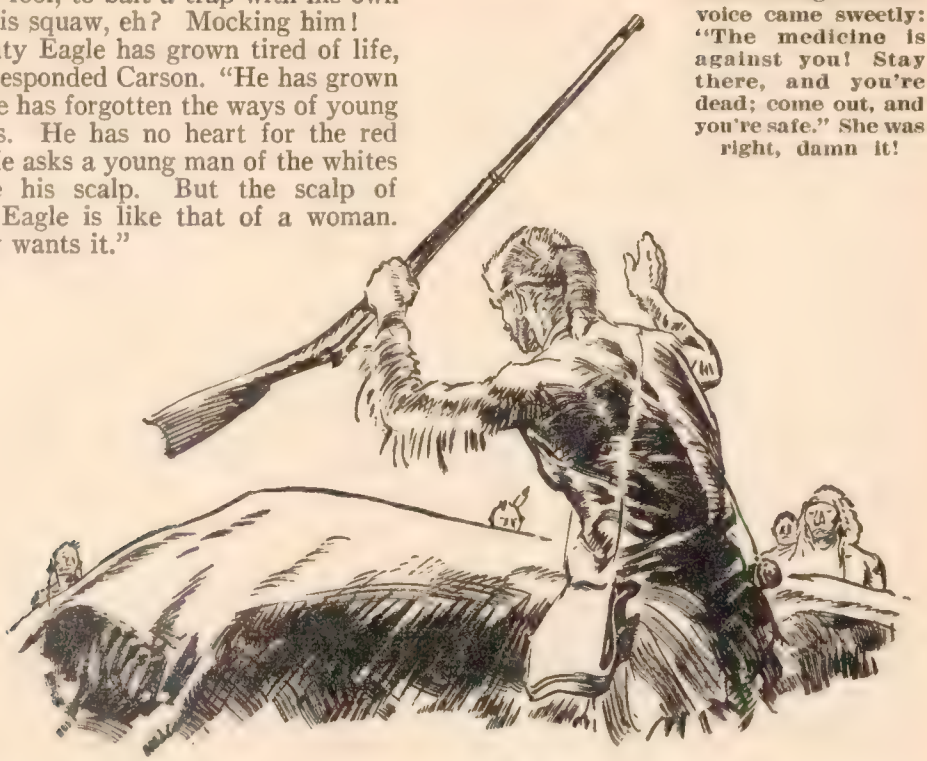
Carson answered only with the long iron poised over his parapet of rock, poised and leveled. To his amazement, Plenty Eagle laughed loudly and scornfully, flung words of derision at him.

"Come out, Little Chief, and you shall live for a little while. I think you look for somebody. When you are dead, you are no good. Perhaps Little Chief would like to kill me? The scalp of Plenty Eagle would be a proud boast for any man. Very well; I am here. Let Little Chief shoot, and show his squaw the scalp of Plenty Eagle!"

Carson probed. What was back of it? A trap to unload his rifle? The chief was

no such fool, to bait a trap with his own life. His squaw, eh? Mocking him!

"Plenty Eagle has grown tired of life, then," responded Carson. "He has grown old. He has forgotten the ways of young warriors. He has no heart for the red trail. He asks a young man of the whites to take his scalp. But the scalp of Plenty Eagle is like that of a woman. Nobody wants it."



The dancing woman's voice came sweetly: "The medicine is against you! Stay there, and you're dead; come out, and you're safe." She was right, damn it!

The gibes went home. The proud, deep voice came back quickly, hotly:

"Little Chief cannot hurt me. I wear medicine here,"—and Plenty Eagle tapped his chest,—"that will blind your gun. Let Little Chief shoot me, and then my young men will tear off his hair before he can load again."

Amazingly, the chief meant his words, believed himself invulnerable!

Carson's brain raced, even while he listened. He had only this thing left—why not grasp it? Stephens was dead, could bring him no rescue. His arch enemy was here taunting him. Gun empty, the end would come, but a worthwhile end. A mountain man lived by fighting, and could die no better than by fighting when the trail closed. No one lived forever. The bloody scalp, waving yonder!

"Then we take the ghost-trail together!" snapped out Carson.

Abruptly he was firmed, eager, lusting to even the score. He slipped a bullet into his mouth and shifted his powder-horn convenient to hand. He was prepared to reload at top speed, without rammer or patch; the spittled ball would cling to its seat atop the powder. He would give the devils a surprise yet!

The long barrel steadied like the choosing finger of Fate. The thin crest of the low knife-blade front sight notched in the rear bar, and cut the beaded medicine-sack hanging on that broad swart chest. Cheek cuddled stock; finger gently closed on trigger for the shot.

Upon this instant, another dust-devil lifted and whirled, charged across the open straight upon Carson and clawed him in the eyes. Too late to check himself. The rifle exploded, and as it did so, he knew the ball had gone wide of the mark.

A wild oath shook him fiercely. Yelping whoops of glee arose. His hand darted to powder-horn; Plenty Eagle stood unmoved, unhurt. There was an uprush of figures, but they suddenly halted and fell apart. Another shape appeared, came and stood before Plenty Eagle.

Carson's eyes widened, but his hands were busy—powder in, bullet following powder. The dancing woman, Shunan's daughter, there facing him. Her voice rang out to him, sweetly, piercingly:

"The medicine is against you; your gun shoots crooked. Stay there, and you're dead! Come out, and you're safe, I promise you. Look behind you!"

Carson looked not, save at her, but his ears told him enough. So did his twitching spine. While Plenty Eagle dared him, Blackfeet had gained his rear. But

the rifle was loaded now. He made jeering response.

"Aye, safe as in a whelping wolf's den! My next ball doesn't miss."

"Plenty Eagle has proved his medicine; your ball was turned aside," she retorted. "Don't be a fool. You haven't a chance, unless you obey me. You may kill one man, and that's the end. Believe me when I say you'll not be harmed if you come out. Plenty Eagle wants to talk to you."

"I'm listening," said Carson grimly.

"Not here; it's too important. In camp. You'll find something there, my friend. What? Long life, maybe. Gamble that against one shot. Worth while? Of course it is. Your last chance. Speak up!"

In camp? What awaited him there? Shunan, perhaps; or perhaps Singing Bird. Some trick of this she-devil? Of course it was; yet without it, his end was sure and prompt. With Stephens dead, he could not hope for rescue from Bridger. They wanted to strike some bargain, wanted information about the white beaver, of a surety; nothing he could accept. But while man lived, man could seize chances.

So, running the matter over in his mind, Carson came to his usual quiet decision. He had lost face by that accursed shot, thanks to the dust-devil. If he fought it out, he was sure of death very quickly. Here was the chance to seize, the gamble to take. She was right, damn it all!

CARSON stood up, walked out, strode forward. The air rocked to the wild whoops. He knew what to expect, and well that he did; life alone, nothing more. He kept firm grip on himself.

The Blackfeet were prompt to surge forth. He was astonished at the numbers of them. The group closed in upon him, plucked at him, jostled him hither and thither. His rifle was wrested away. In a moment he was stripped of everything save clothes. In another moment he was being buffeted and kicked and prodded.

He was hustled upon a horse and forced to cling fast to the warrior before him. Plenty Eagle and the woman had remained aloof. Now, in the midst of the painted crew, Carson was borne along at a gallop, a fast-sweeping pace that did not spare the brutes. A bitter ride for him, yet in some ways astonishing. Everything that Shunan's daughter did was astonishing, he reflected; neither white nor Indian, she had the erratic genius that comes to a mixture of races, vision too often futile and yet strangely powerful.

SETTING sun rimmed the western horizon with light, broken by uplifts of ridges and buttes. It was half submerged when the tearing rout came whooping into camp. This was only a way-station, a point of rendezvous for parties on the war-trail. A few shelters of brush and hide, three or four squaws, a small gathering of waiting warriors, beside a stream in a grassy flat partly encircled by safely distant hills.

The scalp came forth, attracting all eyes, rousing all voices. In the discordant riot, Carson slid from the horse and sat down on the sod. The scalp was shaken in his face, and one glance was enough. It was not from the brown hair of Stephens at all. This hair was black and coarse, from some Indian's head, probably that of a wandering Crow.

His relief was sudden and violent, even though he had been tricked. His cruel regret disappeared. The boy had escaped, then; he would get in with word that Carson had been killed or captived. Jim Bridger would come looking with his riflemen. There was always a chance, just as he had thought.

Carson sat pretending indifference to the insults of the screaming squaws and gibing warriors, but his eyes were busy. He saw Plenty Eagle stalk to one of the hide shelters, there to be tended by the youngest of the women, evidently a wife. He wondered whether Singing Bird were in the camp—then wonder died, as a flame of red caught his eye. Shunan! Huge figure on massy legs, rolling toward him!

Shunan, in buckskin and moccasins, his right arm held somewhat stiffly—coming straight forward, a broad grin upon his bearded visage. He halted before Carson, nodded, then seated himself. Folded arms resting upon the fusil in his lap, he stared Carson in the face and grinned anew.

"So you have come to Shunan, *hein?* Leetle Chief is wise. Hot blood has been let. I see your head is well. My arm is well. Maybe we be friends yet."

"Maybe not," said Carson. "Where's the girl?"

"Ho! Still that 'Rapahoe, that leetle squaw?" Shunan shrugged. "Hell! She's not where you'll find her. I told you she's not for you. She's for me, when I

get ready to take her with me. Better not to talk of her. Better talk of something possible, of whether you live or die."

"Thanks for the choice," Carson spat forth savagely. "But you've got no choice, Shunan. If I don't kill you, the 'Rapahoes will. Chew on that."

"Bah!" The Frenchman shrugged. But behind his shaggy beard and framing locks, his broad face held uneasiness. "I will give twenty horses again. Now for you, my friend: Unless you walk very straight, you will be looking at your own scalp while your ghost goes out in fire. By gar! When the Blackfeet are tired of your hair, I give it to the leetle squaw's baby to play with."

"Red makes a better plaything," said Carson. "Got your note."

"I do not wish you to die by the Blackfeet. I leave a note, I say I fight you again, kill you; but now it is different. Plenty Eagle know he is strong, he tell me go to hell." Shunan again shrugged. "You do well to listen what Plenty Eagle has to say. Open your ears to him. I don't want the Blackfeet to kill you. You tore my beard. I want to trade hair with you myself, damn you!"

The man sat surly, glowering. Plenty Eagle had told him to go to hell, eh? Carson was curious. This Blackfoot chief had suddenly waxed big. Medicine, eh? Well, that bullet had certainly missed. Laforay and Herring had missed. Mere chance? Maybe, but none the less Carson felt a little thrill of superstitious wonder.

NOW dusk seeped into the brief twilight. Fires were smoking, flickering, licking at skewered meat and reddening the crouching forms around. Carson's glance followed a moving figure—Marie, Shunan's daughter, going into one of the closer shelters. Was Singing Bird there?

Plenty Eagle came out of his shelter. His young squaw would have spoken, but he roughly shoved her aside. Dignified in his dressed robe, donned against the chill of the night, he came striding across to where Carson sat. He squatted abruptly, and for a moment gazed at the captive with intently searching eyes.

"In the camp near the big fort I saw your knife red with Blackfoot blood," he said, partly in word, partly by sign. "After that, you and your men killed some of my young men. I said you would not be harmed if you came out of your hole. Well, you were not harmed. Now it is different. My young men shout for your life. What will you do to keep it?"

"I'll do plenty if you give back my gun and horse," said Carson. "Or take your own rifle and stand before me."

"You are a fool, Little Chief. You saw my medicine work. You have no bullet that will strike me."

"A knife will," shot back Carson. "Try the knife."

"I am protected by my medicine. Your ball would miss; your knife would be blunted," Plenty Eagle replied coldly. "My young men wish to amuse themselves. It would give them no pleasure if I killed you quickly. But there is something else that you can do."

"What?"

"In the morning. Make ready to listen then. You will learn why I have let you live."

Carson grunted. "What have you done with Singing Bird?"

Plenty Eagle smiled slightly.

"This man Shunan says she is his. She is where she will hear your death-song before he takes her away. I am done." He made the "cut off" sign, and stood up, his wide, thin lips still smiling. "I will send you something to eat. You will need a strong stomach."

The chief went striding away to his shelter again. Shunan guffawed softly.

"A dance, maybe medicine doings, *hein?* He make plenty medicine, that chief. It will be good to see. Let's hope the rain comes not too soon and spoil it. The leetle squaw and Shunan sleep dry, but you sleep wet. *Au revoir!* Until morning."

He grunted, rose, and swung away.

Carson glanced past the hulking figure, at the closest shelter, the one into which Marie had vanished. His eyes glinted in discovery. There in the entrance appeared a blanket-hooded face, reflecting the firelight. Then it was gone again—but Carson sat with pulses astir: The face of Singing Bird, the Arapahoe girl.

CHAPTER X

THE young squaw, Plenty Eagle's favorite, came at once with a strip of meat for Carson, two warriors at her heels. Something in her look, something in her quickly averted eyes, hinted to Carson of pity, of some knowledge he lacked. No words passed, however, no sign. Other Blackfeet were watching from the shadows.

The two warriors trussed his ankles, drove stakes to either side, and made fast hide thongs. They waited impatiently while he munched.

"Little Chief will see great medicine," sneered one. "His heart will turn to water."

"Not so," Carson said composedly. "Little Chief needs no medicine. He is not like the Blackfeet warriors, who have the hearts of women and need medicine to make them brave—"

They jumped him angrily, tore the last fragment of meat from his hand, then tied his wrists to the lines from the stakes. This done, they hurried away.

The wind from out the night was damp, driving gustily, with a high moaning as though it fled a coming storm and found no haven here. A pole had been erected in the center of the camp. A ruddy-sparking fire lighted the pole and the hung scalp, which eddied and swung in the gusts.

With whoop and stamp and boastful gesture, the file of warriors circled the pole in a giddy, endless dance. Carson, staked out for the night, watched them dance the scalp. The few squaws chanted the old, old scalp-song. Seated at one side were Plenty Eagle, Shunan and the girl Marie, watching the proceedings.

AT last the dance broke. The sweated, exhausted warriors flung themselves down to rest. Another figure came into the scene; an old medicine-man, a scrawny thing of bones and parchment skin, bandy-legged, naked save for a dirty clout, in hideous paint and medicine headdress of fur and feathers and buffalo-horns. He circled the pole, cackling out his own chant in shrill tones, while the firelight shone upon his grotesque figure, fluted ribs and headgear.

Of a sudden he stiffened, fell headlong, and lay motionless as one dead. There was a silence of panting warriors, all eyes gripped on him. Presently the man groaned, twitched, then came nimbly to his feet and tottered straight for Plenty Eagle. His voice came in exultant words, reaching Carson clearly:

"I have seen! I have seen! The great medicine will come to you. It is waiting for you, on the Yellowstone."

Grunts made response. The medicine-man swung around and headed for where Carson lay, far outside the circle. He stood over the bound man, his eyes bright as those of a snake, glittering in the fire-glow.

"Mangy dog!" he cried out. "I see you fighting. I see Little Chief fighting. He is fighting death. His scalp hangs in a Blackfoot lodge. *Wagh!*"

Leaning forward, he spat at Carson's face, then turned and was gone in the obscurity. Carson remained silent, giving them no satisfaction. As for the prophecy, time would answer that.

The dance was resumed now, with *thud, thud!* and shrill *"Ki-yi!"* while the mute scalp floated from the pole. The woman Marie had vanished; she was not wasting her accomplishments on this sorry gathering. Carson's thoughts drifted to the morrow: Plenty Eagle had some proposal to make. Perhaps Bridger would arrive.

NOW came the rain, heralded by a sprinkle, a pattering dash, then a burst of heavy drops riding the wind, deluging the earth, extinguishing the fire, driving the dancers to hasty cover of thatched brush and buffalo robe.

The darkness was impenetrable, save when now and again it was rent by a dazzle of lightning which left the ensuing night more smothersome. Carson eased himself on one side, getting his back to the torrent. He took the soaking with small heed, and gave himself to relaxation. He even managed to get snatches of sleep. Discomfort was of small moment to mountain men.

From one of these snatches he was roused by a touch on the shoulder. The storm had lulled to a steady drumming of rain. Beside him crouched a figure—a woman, by the low voice.

"You go, quick!"

A knife was laid to the thongs that bound him. Into his stiffened hands was thrust his rifle; then his other "fixin's" followed. Chilled and numbed, he wakened to life and astonishment. The low voice again, filled now with anger:

"Come quick. You go with her. Plenty Eagle needs no more wife."

Her hand drew him; and he yielded, docile, with growing comprehension. Beside a brush shelter grew the shape of a horse, waiting, a blanketed figure on its back. A word, and all was clear. Singing Bird!

Thank the Lord for women's intrigue! Plenty Eagle's young squaw had managed this. Jealous, suspecting the Arapahoe had been stolen for her master, taking this opportunity to get rid of a rival by sure hand. Carson could have laughed aloud in sheer joy, but wasted no time.

"You're my big medicine," said Carson. "Strong medicine, bringing luck with you!" He caught her low laughter, and felt the pressure of her arm around him.

He scrambled aboard, gathered up the reins, and his pulses leaped to the thrill of freedom. The girl, voiceless in her shrouding blanket, straddled behind him and clung to his waist. They were away.

Carson rode at cautious pace, the slow hoofbeats making no sound. Once well clear of the camp, he quickened the horse to a lope and gave the animal its head; an Indian beast, it was sure-footed, safe. He pressed on through the night, and laughed as he thought of Shunan.

The girl was warm against his back; her arm was firm about him. He spoke over his shoulder.

"How, Singing Bird! We go together. Free!"

Through the blanket that covered her head from the rain, he heard her soft, low murmur, the words lost. Carson laughed joyously and gave all his attention now to aiding the horse in picking its way. Pelting rain did not encourage either sentiment or conversation.

The hours passed: The dawn was slow in coming, but none too slow to suit Kit Carson. The rain would wash away all trail, and except by luck the Blackfeet would never pick it up. Fortune was with him now, fortune and Singing Bird.

The rain slackened at last; then it became a drizzle, and eventually the drizzle thinned and ceased. Stars twinkled now through the breaking clouds. The air

began to lighten by almost imperceptible degrees; dawn was at hand.

Carson turned his head slightly.

"You're my big medicine," he said. "You, Singing Bird! Strong medicine, yes, bringing luck with you."

He caught her low, rich laughter, felt the pressure of her arm around him, and was supremely content.

Birds were chirping, and the sky was pink for a fair day when at last he drew rein, halting in a little hollow among the hills, beside a rise which afforded a view of the back trail. At his word, the girl slid off. He swung to the earth, had a glimpse of her waiting, still in her sodden blanket, but with instinctive caution gave first heed to the priming of his rifle.

Then he turned to her. The ride had been blind, but they had made good distance. Now to take stock, get bearings, lay further course. Carson extended his hand, but in the act of speaking, the gay words died upon his lips as she threw back her blanket folds.

HE stood stunned, incredulous. All the world turned over within him. Not Singing Bird at all—not the round, shy features of the Arapahoe girl. Instead, the quick eager smile, the lovely oval, the sparkling eyes of Marie, Shunan's daughter.

"You!" he blurted out, and choked down an oath. *"You!"*

His stupefaction brought laughter into her eyes.

"And not Singing Bird. You're sorry? Nonsense! You've done something better than carry off a squaw. You have me to thank for your freedom, Kit."

"You be hanged," he said. "Where is she?"

The girl came close to him, touched his arm.

"Listen, try to understand. What does it matter to you where she is? She is for my father, not for you. Do you think he, or Plenty Eagle either, would hand her over to you? If you had stayed back there with the Blackfeet, she would have seen you die. So I played a little trick on them all—"

"She was there, aye," Carson broke in hotly, then got himself under control. "Trickery, eh? The squaw who cut me free—does she know the truth?"

"She does by this time," And Marie's silvery laughter rang on the morning. "She was jealous; she thought the girl was a new wife for Plenty Eagle. So we arranged it. I was to have the girl all ready. Instead, I was ready—" And she broke into renewed mirth, so merry and quick that it was hard to resist. But Carson burned anew with anger and shame.

"She's there, back there!" he muttered. "Then I'm going back."

THINGS turned red before him. Mortification suffocated him. He had been tricked into fleeing with this hell-cat daughter of Shunan! And he could guess that Shunan had been a party to it.

"Don't be a fool." Her fingers tightened on his arm. "Everybody in the camp knows now that we've gone together. They'll all know that I set you free. You've lost the Arapahoe girl; if we went back, she'd not look twice at you now. You've lost her in any case. You've won something better."

Her voice thrilled and deepened.

"Look at me, Kit! Is it such a terrible thing I offer you? I have humiliated myself—I, for whom many men have offered fortunes! This is the last time, I warn you. That girl is nothing; you do not love her, but I do love you. First I wanted you for the head, now it is for the heart. First because you were Kit Carson, Little Chief, a man to be of use to us. Now it is different—"

Carson straightened up, flushed, angry, awkward and embarrassed before such words as these.

"Enough!" he said harshly. "I'm going back."

"You don't mean that; you're angry. If we did go back, you'd die. I could not help you. I am Go Everywhere Woman; a Blackfoot lodge is mine whenever I want it; but Plenty Eagle is stronger now. That medicine of his gives him command."

"Medicine?" said Carson. "That bead pouch at his throat?"

"Yes. He listens to it. His men believe in it. Why not? No bullet touches him. This medicine makes him bold, domineering, obstinate. Are my words nothing to you?"

"No more than you yourself are," said Carson bluntly. The sun was up; Plenty Eagle would be furious over the escape of his captive, his proposal unspoken. Somewhere was Jim Bridger, perhaps alarmed, perhaps planning rescue in force.

"Do you stay here or ride with me?" he went on.

The girl flushed.

"You don't dare leave me. Do you know where we are? No, but I do. If you

backtrack, you'll die sure. You won't be able to find your own party. I was angry at you before, yes; I have been very angry at you. I was still angry when I called to bring you out of the cañon. I wanted them to kill you."

Carson started. Here was confession, straight talk; she met his eyes squarely, her face filled with emotion, her breast heaving.

"You? You did that?" he questioned. Then Stephens must have got clear away!

"Yes. And when I saw you, I was sorry. I could not let you die, Kit. I managed everything. Listen! I'll show you the way out of here, into the Hudson's Bay country. The Blackfeet will get that big medicine now—you heard the vision of the medicine-man? Captain Bridger and his men will surely be killed. The Blackfeet are too strong, too many for them. The medicine dreams have shown a red sky, the waters choked with bodies. Then when the White Beaver passes the mountains—what? For you, safety. I can make you safe."

Damn the woman! Now she was at her schemes again. For a moment Carson had felt shaken by her appeal, by her vivid emotion.

"There's a heap you can't do, or Plenty Eagle either," he said, and stepped toward the grazing horse. The warriors would be riding hard; time was short. "Last word. Do you come with me, or stay here?"

Her eyes flashed. "You ride where?"

"To find Bridger. Later on I'll find your father and plenty Eagle."

"And the Arapahoe girl, eh?" She whitened to the lips. No mistaking Carson's firm utterance; he was unshaken now. Her eyes dilated and darkened; her head came up. "So that's your answer? Very well, it's ended. I know where your Blanket Chief and his men are camped. I can take you there; but it's not the camp you think about. It's a new camp, near a lake."

CARSON caught at the word, remembering Laforay's vision. Likely enough. Jim Bridger might have moved on toward the brigade rendezvous.

"How d'you know that?" he shot out.

"I'm Go Everywhere Woman; I know everything," she said, with a little disdainful smile. "Besides, it is the medicine talk. You Americans cannot hide from us."

She would go with him, then; she would guide him. She turned toward the horse and mounted with swift agility. She was still very white; her voice was strange and hard; but Carson grunted with satisfaction. She had given up her mad folly, and that was enough for him. He mounted in front of her once again. The sun was warming and drying him; the back-trail was clear.

"Our trail forks at Bridger's camp," he said curtly. She made no comment. She had learned her lesson, he thought with some relief.

"Straight through the pass yonder, and then turn north," she directed.

She sat with easy poise, with an occasional steadying touch of her hand. Now and again she gave a word as to their course. In the night they had ridden as one! here they rode as two. He was about to be rid of her, he reflected; and he was heartily glad.

AS they jogged on the day waxed. Carson was no longer impatient; danger was lessening steadily, and there was no sign of pursuit. He was a free man again, and no country hereabouts could long puzzle him. He needed only some familiar landmark to know his position.

She did no talking. As the day wore on, Carson's eyes were ever busy. The breeze blew strongly from the southwest. By the air striking his left cheek, and by the sun, he knew that the course ever inclined to the north; easy keeping it so. There lay the main Yellowstone. As for the lake she had mentioned, that should be Laforay's lake. Odd how he trusted the visions of the Iroquois, where he disdained those of other dreamers! Something about Laforay's medicine was good. . . .

So at last they were riding down a wind-swept valley, where the long grasses bowed and the aspens twinkled, while barren dun hills bit into the near horizon on either hand. Somewhere ahead the valley was due to open and widen. . . . The horse snorted and quickened pace with ears up-pricked, as though sensing the end of trail. A horse will smell other horses afar.

The hills upon the right were lowered and lessened, finally to drop away. Half turning for a glance rearward, Carson was conscious that the woman had her gaze upon the hills. She spoke quickly, eagerly:

"You'll see the lake soon. The camp lies around the last shoulder on the right."

Queer how she had known of Bridger's changed base, thought Carson. Yet her knowledge had served him well. Looking ahead, he presently glimpsed the glint of blue water. The blue widened. They swung off to the right, to round the shoulder of the hill. A flat extended back from the lake. Gradually the shore was revealed. The camp ought to be sighted at any instant, now.

SUDDENLY, into the open before he saw it, Carson threw the horse upon its haunches.

Camp, eh? Two-score peaked lodges clustered on a feeder to the lake, scarce beyond hailing distance. Other lodges beyond, the murmurs of a big Indian village borne to him, even against the breeze. Blackfeet lodges!

"This is the camp I promised!" Her exultant words sounded at his ear. "You'll find the Arapahoe girl here if you wait. Plenty Eagle's village—"

Already the alarm was up. Boy horse-herders running, whoops rising, warriors flitting on the jump. Carson acted instantly.

"You she-devil!" His arm swept out, thrust her away, sent her rolling on the ground. Her voice came with shrill fury:

"Now I'll see you killed, you fool! I hate you forever—"

His heels clapped in. No back-trailing. Riders were behind him, sweeping out and around. Blackfeet were racing from either side; warriors a-horse were bursting from the trees. He had been espied from afar. Only the narrowing way to the lake itself was open.

He sent the horse leaping ahead, seizing the one chance, taking it full gallop. The tempest of whoops dinned in his ears. So close he came to the first lodges of the village that he could smell the offal, and squaws screamed and ran. Now the enemy were cutting between him and the lake.

One warrior swerved in to front him in his very course. Carson dropped rein and fetched up his rifle. He fired. The warrior cried out and lurched from his horse, to sprawl in a limp clump on the ground. Carson sent his horse springing across the man's body. Hammering on down the narrowing path to the lake, through angry yells and the bark of guns, he put the animal into the water at a leap. They gained swimming depth, while around them bullet and shaft flicked and sprayed the surface.

Carson slid off the horse. Animal's tail in one hand, rifle held high in the other, he followed in the wake of his mount. The water was icy cold. Now the tumult died down and ceased; the bullets ceased; the horse swam on for the opposite shore, green with reeds and pricked out by a few trees.

The silence was strange, unless the warriors were riding hard to round the lake. None were swimming in pursuit, as glance showed. The horse at length found footing, and Carson flung himself forward. He scrambled into the saddle and rode splashing through the fringe of ooze and rushes, shaking not so much with a chill as with a hearty laugh. Man, horse and rifle—here he was, and not dead yet!

Firmer ground now. He was tilting the powder-horn for a reload, when he froze with a chill indeed. He heard the warning hiss. He looked into the black leveled rifles and the blacker eyes behind them. Three warriors, waiting here like snakes at the water's edge. A tired mount and gun unprimed; three rifles covering him.

THE waiting Blackfeet grinned, as Carson signed surrender.

They took his reins, took his rifle and all else, and rode with him around the lake shore. Hardest to bear was the sight of the woman standing there, poised, intent, watching him with eyes aflame, utter vindictive hatred in every line of her. Spurned for the last time! She would be set to have him scalped now, and no change of heart this time.

The ribald clamor beat around him as the Blackfeet gathered. He was hustled along, pulled off the horse, shoved into a lodge. . . . Outside, the tumult had begun to die, when it suddenly quickened again with fresh yells. Something had happened out there.

Distant voices and the pounding *thud-thud* of hoofbeats, the scalp-whoop echoing up from all quarters. The confusion redoubled. Outside the lodge itself came bursts of voices, a scuffle; then the flap was thrown aside. A figure was pitched in, to land sprawling.

A white man, begrimed, half stripped of his buckskins, buffeted and bleeding, but whole. He scrambled to his feet.

Carson stared into the pallid face, the dilated eyes, of young Stephens.

The vision of Bridger riding the rescue trail was snuffed like a doused ember.

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So He Bopped Me

By EDWARD L. ENGLISH

THIS truck come bustin' into the crossing without a pause. I pulled up my cab with a jerk that set my watch back four days. But the joker in the coupé got smacked. His car was piled up in the gutter.

Him and I and the truck-driver all scrambled out. The chump whose car had been folded up was shaking so bad that he seemed to be twins. He was as tall as me, but he looked timid. "You seemed to be coming awfully fast," he said.

"Now, look," blurted out the truck skipper. "A few smart cracks out of you, and I'll flatten you so flat that you won't even throw a shadow."

He was tough. But not tough enough.

"Hey, wait a minute," I told him.

The truck-hustler faced me. Then I bopped him—a straight left to the chin. There was lots of oomph behind it. He went down, colder than the shady side of a polar bear.

"Taxi, Mister?" I asked the tall chap. "Your heap won't roll—not even downhill."

"Why—uh—yes," he answered with a fumble.

"You got a nasty bump on the knob," I told him, "and so I guess I better run you by a hospital."

"Forget it," he said.

"Yeah, but the cops might trace your wrecked car and charge you with feloniously leaving an accident. At the hospital they'll put your name on file, and then you got a good excuse."

"That's fast thinking," he laughed.

After the patchwork, I run him home. He had a swell lair in Twelvetrees Terrace. When we got there, he thanked me for taking his part.

"I wasn't taking your part," I told him. "I just don't clap my hands over truck-drivers. They're a knife-in-the-back to my profession. One of them zunked my cab Tuesday and then kept on rolling. I lost him in traffic. I swore I'd bop the next truck-driver that talked out of turn—or even talked."

"You were certainly quick," he said.

"There's two kinds of people," I pointed out. "The quick—and the dead-from-the-neck-up."

He invited me in for a snifter. I went. He said his name was George Critchell. I said mine was Lou Bent. He asked if I got into many mixes.

"More than I get out of," I said. "I don't go around snorting for trouble, but anybody that wants trouble with me can get it."

George—he said to call him George—stared into his glass. He had a frown that dripped vinegar.

"I wish I were more like you," he said finally.

I almost choked. The people who wished they was like me you could count on the fingers of one hand of a herring.

He said he wished he had a scrappy disposition like I got.

"That's as simple as my brother-in-law!" And I laughed. "When somebody gripes you, bop them."

George sighed. "I guess," he guessed, "I'm just not the boppy kind."

"I'll—*guk*—get out!" he yelped. "Sure—but not yet," I snapped.

George poured another poultice. Then we took down our hair and talked it over lung-to-lung. He said that when he quit wearing safety-pins his mother still made him wear curls. Mine made me wear clothes. His old lady told him it was nasty-bad to fight. My maw told me to double-paste anybody that pasted me.

"I must be too timid or peaceable, Lou," George said. "I know I've shown courage in more than one pinch. But somehow most things seem too small to quarrel over, and I usually let people walk all over me when I ought to, I suppose—ought to—uh—"

"Bop them," I finished.

"Right," he said. "What worries me is Judy."

Judy, he explained, was the gal he was all honked up about. We were off! Judy's wavy hair was on the gold standard. Her hazel eyes sparkled the same as a fifty-cent tip. Her eyelashes were long, dark, curly and fluttery. Her figure didn't have a brick out of place, and it caused more accidents than bad brakes. Judy liked he-men—guys that would fight at the drop of a hat. He sighed again.

So we had another snifter. Dames do that to you. . . . That's the nice thing about them.

George said life would be just a star-spangled bust if he didn't win Judy's confidence and lead her to the scaffold. Everything else that it takes he had, including considerable boodle nicely invested, a sweet brokerage business, and a certain amount of good looks. In a word, the things that make them look twice and wish once.

"Well, I got to duffy," I said. "The meter said the sting was $2.65."

"Lou," he said out of a practically cloudless sky, "how would you like to come to work for me?"

"Have you got a cab business?" I asked him after my head wove its way out of a tailspin.

"No, as a sort of trainer," George diagrammed me, "I want to watch you in action, learn your style. I want to develop the knack of bopping anybody who is eligible for a first-class, A-1 blown-in-the-bottle bopping."

"If there's any real folding money goes with the chore, I'm your hired help," I agreed.

He asked me what I made tooling my crate around, and I admitted that tops was about forty a week with no Christmas bonus. He offered me fifty, a room to kip in and my nourishment.

"In the burlap," I said.

It was a break. My concrete-mixer needed reboring and over-size pistons. The job would singe me about a hundred bucks. All I had in my pocket was a bulge.

"I'll have the basement Rathskeller done over into a gym," George announced.

"And I'll put my hack up on jacks, pack some clothes into a couple of keesters and be back before you know I've gone," I told him.

AT three in the P.M. I was back. George gave me a swell room and explained that he lived in this big garage all alone since his daddy and mother had died two years before—alone except for an old housekeeper and cook named Bertha, and a Japanese boy named Kimo. It looked like a gravy spot for little Lou. In fact, I could feel the gravy seeping in over my shoe-tops already.

Kimo had the Rathskeller furniture all moved out, and half an hour later a sporting-goods house man arrived with a truckload of Indian clubs, floor-mats, wall-weights, punching-bags, hydraulic rowing machines, boxing-gloves and other knickknacks.

I decided that it would be best, instead of having a daily lecture course, to just mill around and point out his mistakes as we went along. I told him I wanted first to learn him a few things about defense and invited him to make a pass at me—any kind of a punch.

He started a left to the body. I dropped my dukes to block it—both of them. That was bad. It was terrible. George pulled his punch and crashed a right to my uncovered jaw that spun me shoestrings over appetite. Instantly I knew that the contractor who built that house hadn't cheated on the concrete floor.

It was a one-three-five mix.

Before I quit echoing, George was on the floor beside me—on his knees. He all but had tears in his eyes.

"Gosh, I'm sorry, Lou," he mumbled, patting me. "I didn't mean to do that. Did it hurt much?"

It did. I said it didn't.

"It was a swell bop, though," I told him. "I don't see why a guy who can put that much one-way ticket on a punch wants any prompting on how to bop guys."

George sat down and stared at his gloves. "That's the catch," he grunted. "I'm big and healthy. I can hit hard. But I'm entirely too peaceable. I always try to settle things in a nice way—and then people make an amateur hour out of me. I guess I'm too slow to get mad.

"And that's no way to make a woman 'Oh' and 'Ah' over your portrait," he went on. "Women like to feel that their men will mix it for them—at the take of a breath. It proves that the protective instinct is in a man. Women's instinct is to be protected. Judy tells me I'm too easy-going. She said she saw me humiliated more than one time."

I began to think that this here Judy would look at home in a bowl full of pecans.

Just as me and George were getting ready to take a shower about an hour later, Judy come in for a cocktail, bringing along a gal that me and thousands of other people would describe as unimportant. Judy was a party that any normal man would go for in an extensive way. I took one look at her and decided I was normal. To describe her looks, I'd have to be a guy that bats out poetry and songs. I drive a cab. As for disposition, I'd say she was sassy-sweet.

"So you're George's athletic instructor," Judy said. "You certainly look athletic. Nature must have used a rain-barrel for a model when she made your chest."

Then she laughed and said I should have remembered that women were the weaker sex when I shook hands with her, on account of her mitt felt like it had caught itself in a cider-press.

IT seemed her and George were going out to dinner; so while he showered, shaved and dressed, her and I had a little talk. We this-and-thatted for a while, and then she gave me a wise smile.

"This isn't my night for being easily fooled," she told me.

"If that crack is aimed at me," I answered her, "I'll say you are doing a good man a great injustice. I quit trying to fool dames seven years ago."

"No; it's George," Judy explained. "He doesn't need an athletic instructor. He's healthy and athletic enough. It's the manly art, isn't it, that he's interested in?"

By "manly art," she meant bopping guys.

"Lady," I told her, "I know when to be a good listener."

"I don't want you to get a wrong idea about George," Judy said. "I've

criticized him a lot recently about being too good-natured. He seems to have taken it seriously. That's why he's got you. There's something about you that he wants to learn. How did it happen?"

"He seen me bop a guy," I said.

"That's what I suspected." And Judy smiled again. "That's just what I've criticized George about. Only a month ago, a man who was entirely at fault ran into George's car. Instead of apologizing, this man had the impudence to begin bawling George out. George tried to be nice about it."

"He should have bopped the mugg," I growled.

"You and I see eye to eye, Lou," the gal sighed. "But don't think he's a coward. He proved that to me—twice. He just isn't quick enough to act when somebody is ugly to him. Do you know what I'm driving at, Lou?"

"Sure," said I; "you think that George ought to be a little more . . . uh . . . slightly more—umm—"

"Aggressive," Judy put in—and I told her she took the words out of my windpipe.

"Don't worry," I promised her. "I'll make that baby a walking declaration of war."

That's what I thought. In the next three months I decided that George was a puzzling enough party to show a Chinese-puzzle designer something strictly new in puzzlements. He developed into a fast guy with his fists, but he never used them on nobody but me in our workouts. Nothing and nobody seemed to make him mad enough to turn it on.

THERE was the stumblebum that tried to snipe our parking-place. George was driving. He had covered off a spot just vacated by a big sixteen-cylinder job and was getting ready to back in, when the animal-cracker behind us nosed his junk into the opening and blocked us off.

George first tooted the horn mildly to let the guy know he was misbehaving. The punk paid us no mind at all. Then George got out. Me too.

"See here, old man," said George, entirely too good-natured about it, "I had that space covered off. You have no right to it."

"Go lay a brick," the mugg sniffed.

George just stood there looking foolish. I waited—you know for what.

"I think this is a dirty trick," George mumbled. I knew it was.

"I think it's a neat trick," the other guy horse-laughed. He killed his engine, indicating that the unpleasant conversation had come to a brick wall.

George was annoyed. I skipped the annoyed part. I was fighting mad—ready to knock thirty-two teeth down the fellow's throat. I yanked open the door, pulled the fresh squirt out, got him at the throat and set him down on his own front fender. Then I shook him till his eyeballs slapped his tonsils.

"I'll—*guk*—get—out!" he yelped.

"Sure—but not yet," I snapped.

I LET go of him, stepped back a pace and then bopped him. His lower jaw swung like a gate. Then I stuffed him back behind his steering-wheel. With his head pitching, he pulled out and went zigzagging down the street.

Then George got mad—at his self. He was so mad his lips shook.

"Why do I let people do things like that to me?" he asked. He was bitter.

I mobilized my two and a half brain cells, but I couldn't flush an answer.

"Do you think I was afraid of him?" George asked suddenly.

"I know you weren't," I said. "You couldn't be. You're just slow. You want to jump the gun a little more."

George was as quiet as a Pullman porter the rest of the day. So was I. I was thinking. I made up my mind that the next time some guy needed combing and brushing, I was going to wait and let George do it. I didn't want him to get to depending on me.

I didn't have to wait long. This latest nuisance was a bozo claiming to be a City Water Department inspector. He wanted to give the whole house a gander to be sure no faucet had been overlooked in the shuffle. The housekeeper, Bertha, asked him for his credentials. He said he was just fresh out of credentials. So she told him he couldn't come in. So he came in.

Me and George, down in the gym, heard a gasket being blown upstairs, and went to see who was getting panicked.

"Why," this big blob was saying, looking important or tough, or both, "I been inspecting for the city for nine years, and nobody's ever asked me for any credentials."

"But there's always a first time," I reminded him.

"We're wasting time," announced the boy with the odd-sized mouth. "Where's the kitchen?"

"Look here," said George, too polite as usual, "unless you have some sort of identification, you can't inspect this house."

"Listen, I represent the City," the important guy let go with all his vocal cords. "Who's going to stop me?"

Unquestionably, the time for bopping this good man had arrived. Did George bop him? He certainly didn't. He was hesitating again.

Now, I'm like this: I can't pass up opportunity. I let the fellow have it.

It's good we had hardwood floors. Otherwise the lad might have nosed his way right on through. I drug him out the front door, and after he was revived with a dishpan full of cold water—from one of our uninspected faucets—he went on home to hunt up his credentials.

"You and me better drag ourselves down to the gym and have a conference," I suggested to George.

Many a murderer being led out to get his neck cracked has been cheerier than my boss was as we trudged down to the gymnasium.

"Well?" I said, giving him a look that must have put sun-tan up and down his back.

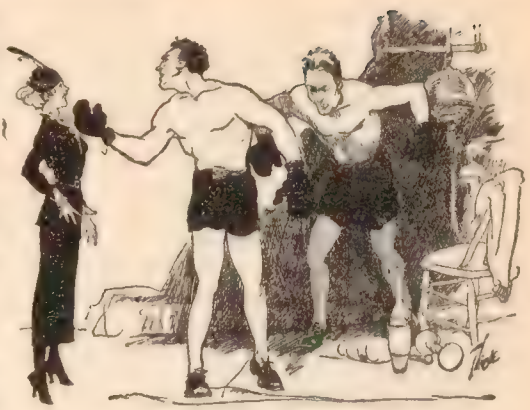
George fished for words. He seemed to have the wrong bait.

"I'll be pulled through a keyhole," I complained, "if I can understand why you didn't tag that punk. He asked who'd stop him. You're the head of the house. He was begging for it."

"Lou," he blurted out bitterly, "I don't seem to understand myself. I'm not afraid of being hit—or hurt. You've hit and hurt me often enough for me to know I can take it. The trouble seems to be in my first reaction to such a mess as this last one. That first reaction is that the matter isn't worth fighting about."

I gave the matter some of my shiniest mental attention for a while before I made a crack.

"You're overlooking one big thing," I finally told him. "That is that life and fight go hand in hand. Every living thing on earth has to fight for its life—babies, blades of grass, nations, dogs, cats and so forth. Sooner or later, every living thing goes up against a situation that says: 'Put up your dukes!' You've got no choice then. You've got to fight. You think that small matters are nothing to fight over. I think they're swell items to scrap about. They keep you in practice till that big moment comes along."



"You're just a fresh brat which is used to having her own way," I said.

The poor guy felt so licked that I quit. I give him a friendly clap on the back and told him to take a shower.

And then that night, after George had gone all alone to a movie, feeling meaner than gar broth, I got a phone call from Judy. She asked how about coming around for a friendly talk.

WELL, her and I had a discussion under the magnolia trees in the garden. I went over everything that had happened since first I barged into George. I told her about him and the guy and the parking-space and about the inspector that wasn't satisfied till he inspected the cracks in the floor.

She gave me a pat on the hand, flicked away her cigarette and sighed: "I—I'm so sorry. . . . I guess he's just—afraid."

That burned me up worse than the Chicago fire burned Chicago.

"Listen, Judy," I said, giving her a shove. "You and me aint in the same class. You got breeding and education and family and dough and all that blah, and I'm a roughneck. Or, that's what you think. But I know when a friend's a friend, and deserves a break. I'm George's friend. I thought you was too. For what you said, if you was my sex, I'd knock you so hard that people seeing you go past would wonder what comet you were. I thought you knew how to think. You don't know how to begin.

"George has got the right stuff in him. He's just had a lot of sissy habits wished on him when he was a kid. He was brought up to be nice. He gets so damned nice that he gets sick of his self. Wash your hands with him if you feel that way. I'm sticking."

Judy took one of my mitts in both of hers and squeezed it.

"Forgive me, Lou," she sighed. "I didn't mean that, of course. What I said about George is what I thought you felt about him. I wanted to find out for sure just how you do feel about him."

I still felt like slamming her into a half a dozen assorted tailspins. I have often wondered who started this notion that it was no gent who would bop a dame. They're always letting go with both jaws. Of all the people that rate bopping, dames is tops, to my notion. But you're expected to treat them as the weaker sex, or the weak-minded sex, or be weak with them. Take your pick.

Anyway, we parted friends.

NOTHING happened for a week—and then a whole year got crowded into a few days.

Just get this picture: Me and George had just got into action with the gloves when Judy trickled in, slamming the door behind her. She seemed to be in a very flip mood. In fact, any neutral observer would have said she was feeling—and acting—smart-alecky. I particularly didn't care for her greeting.

"Hello, my good man of the big biceps and tiny brain-cells," she said.

I didn't hold myself down on account of George was present.

"Hello, my good woman of the big lip and no brain at all," I snapped back at her.

George looked pained. I don't know if I looked it, but I felt pained. I got no house for gals that take advantage of their sex to get fresh and lippy.

Judy perched herself on one of the gym horses and touched off a cigarette. Now, like I've said, I don't go gunning for trouble, but when folks want trouble with me, I'm always at home.

"Hey, put out that cigarette," I told her.

"Why?" asked Judy, sassier than before, and going right on puffing. Honest, anybody seeing her squeeze my mitt that night under the magnolias would have sworn this wasn't the same gal. But then what dame ever did run true to past performances?

"Because we don't want a lot of smoke in a place where exercising people are breathing deep," I informed her.

"Rules are made to be broken," she came back at me, starting to hum a tune.

"So are noses," I shot back. "Drop that snipe!"

She looked at George. He was biting his lip. One crack out of him, and I would have hit him for keeps. I was mad enough to pull lamp-posts up by the roots.

Judy gave me a look that would have poisoned a herd of bull elephants, and threw away the cigarette-stub. She took one more drag before doing it, though, just to aggravate me some more.

Me and George boxed for a while. It was mighty quiet.

"Pretty tame stuff," Judy sniffed. "We want blood."

I ignored her. George drove a hard right at me with lots of that old oomph behind it. I let it pass. I could have mowed him down with my left.

"Don't lead with your right that way, kid," I remarked.

"Why?" asked Judy, just as snippy as a barber's scissors.

"For two reasons, sister," I barked at her. "One is that I tell him not to. The other is that leading with the right might get him half-killed. It leaves him wide open and out of balance."

"That's your mistake," Judy put in, spraying me with sniffs. "I've seen lots of clever fighters use their lefts for defense to plow in with a hay-making right. Of course, if you don't know how to use your right, that's several other things."

I left George standing where he was, turned my back on him and gave this dame just exactly 102 per cent of my undivided attention.

"I don't know, sister," I told her, "whether you're right-handed or left-handed, but you've got three left feet, and you know how to fall over your lip."

"Don't call me 'sister,' you big orang-outang," Judy snarled, scrambling off the gym horse and standing with her feet wide apart and her chin pushed out. That chin was an invitation—I don't mean to my love interest. Man, did she look scrappy! "And I don't know whether you're right or left-handed, either, but you certainly don't know how to use your brain—unless just to keep the top of your head from falling in."

FOR at least thirty seconds we stood there glowering at one another. Then I give her one last blast.

"I used to think you was a lady—" I began.

"I doubt if you used to think," she cut in.

"But what I used to think," I went on, sort of tapping her on the chest with the end of my right glove for emphasis, "aint going to keep me from telling you

what I know now. You're just a fresh brat which is used to having her own way. You think I owe you respect because you're a lady. You're no lady. You're a natural-born tramp."

I didn't have any intention of pasting her, of course, but my left arm raised itself to a punching position by instinct—and stayed right there.

Well, sir; my right elbow suddenly had the feeling of being caught in a machinist's vise. I was spun around so fast that the four walls faded into one. There was a sudden thunderclap in the gym, and it said, "Don't you talk to her like that—don't you touch her!"

THE man I faced wasn't George, but an entirely new guy. His eyes were shooting sparks that could have made a sieve out of a sheet of asbestos. The look on his pan made me think of a tiger that's spied somebody swiping its fresh meat.

"Now, wait a minute, George," I said.

The pity of it was he didn't. He didn't wait even a split second. His raw fist—he had got off his gloves by biting at the tie-strings—slammed my chin with the kind of stuff the Coast Artillery dishes out. I mean *force*. That blow lined my front teeth up with the back of my neck.

I kissed the concrete floor. I knew I was nearly out, but Lou Bent don't give up easy, no matter how badly bent. I got to my feet just in time to strike a nice pose for a sock in the stomach that laid me out. George had an earthquake in each hand. I staggered up again and tried to hit him. No luck. He flattened me once more—and this time I stayed down.

Personally, I was willing to let the matter rest there, but not George. He seemed to have gone nuts. He leaped on top of me, got my throat in his dukes and started to choke me. I started to *guk* and *gerk*. Judy started to scream. She got him by the hair and yanked, still yammering and snaffling at the top of her voice. Just as I passed out, I heard George yell:

"You're fired, you big bum!"

What I saw and heard when I came to, nearly knocked me out again. I was still flat on the floor, but my head was in Judy's lap. Her tears were dripping down on my nose, and she was sobbing: "Oh, you poor thing—you poor thing!"

Didn't I tell you dames are nuts?

George was standing back, looking sheepish. He was fumbling for words.

"Lou, dear, speak to me," Judy begged.

I spoke. I said: *"Ummmmph!"*

"Gosh, I'm sorry, Judy," George mumbled. "I thought—I didn't think—well, the way he was talking to you—"

"I didn't mean to carry it this far," she gulped.

"Carry what this far?" George asked.

"Carry this what far?" I asked.

"Getting you two boys to fight," she answered.

"You mean you deliberately tried to get us to fight?" George added.

Judy looked pretty miserable. Finally she blurted it out.

"Lou," she said, "I was afraid that George was—afraid. I didn't think he'd even fight for me. But I hated to give up. I wanted proof." She got to her feet and threw her arms around the boy friend. "Darling," she said, "I've got the proof I didn't expect to get. If you'll fight for me—then I don't care whether you ever fight for anything else."

They stood there without a word and with their arms around each other for what seemed like hours. I tried to get up. I couldn't. They helped me up and got a doctor. He said I had a busted rib and internal injuries. He sent me to a hospital.

George said he'd come and see me, but he didn't. Four nights later I was able to get around on a cane, and I went to a corner drug-store for a fountain drink. As I sat there, in popped Judy.

"I WAS on my way to the hospital to visit you," she said, "as I passed here and saw you. I've got something to tell you. I suppose I ought to look coy when I say it, but I'm too happy to be coy. George and I are going to be married. I didn't dare refuse again. I was afraid he might bop me."

"What!" I almost yelled. "When?"

"Just as soon as George gets out of jail."

"Jail?" I said. "Jail? What's he doing in jail?"

"Well, Lou," Judy explained, "George is a changed man. First there was the impudent house-to-house salesman that got fresh with Bertha. George bopped him. The fellow threatened a lawsuit—and George then bopped his lawyer.

"Next it was a waiter. I don't know just what was the rub there. The waiter probably said, 'Thank you, sir,' or something else insulting. And finally George came around a corner just in time to see a fight between a big man and a

smaller man. George didn't know what it was about, but he felt a sporting urge to help the little fellow. He bopped the big chap and floored him. The little man upped an alley and disappeared."

I was busting with pride. "Go on, Judy," I begged for more.

"The big man," she sighed, "was a plain-clothes man of the Detective Bureau. The little fellow was a very bad criminal, and the detective was subduing him. Of course, George didn't know the detective was a detective. They took him to jail."

"Who was 'they?'" I asked her anxious-like.

"Five policemen," she said proudly. "Three tried to, but they had to get help."

The girl friend went on to explain that the turnkeys were so afraid of George that at mealtimes they stood back and tossed him bologna sausage through the bars of his cell.

"Gosh, I'm glad, Judy," I said, choking just a mite. "You aint much for fighting with, but you're sure worth fighting for—and taking a licking for."

Judy smiled, with a tear in each eye.

"Did you notice the taxicab I was riding in?" she asked me quickly. I hadn't. "There it is at the curb."

I looked through the drug-store window and saw the kind of a crate I'd always wished for instead of the second-hand junk heaps I'd owned. It was new and shiny and dolled up with chromium and colored riding-lights.

"That's a honey; I'm going to have one like that some day," I remarked.

"I know it," Judy giggled. "But not *some* day! Some night. Tonight. It's yours—a present from a grateful George and a thankful me. Here's the title to it."

With that this dizzy little dame hands me a sheet of paper, takes my head in her hands, kisses me smack on the lips and streaks out of the drug-store.

I was in a daze. When I come out of it, I was looking into a strange face. It belonged to the soda-jerker. He was grinning at me with a soupy look on his pan.

"What do the dames see in you?" asked this big soda punk.

"Bops," I told him.

He looked puzzled. "What," he asked me, "are bops?"

So I bopped him.

Another story by Edward L. English will appear in an early issue.

The man who gave us "The Poisoned Arrow" knows his South America, and here gives us another vivid little drama.

IT was hot in the streets of San Jacinto, but the courtroom in the *jefetura* was fairly cool. A nervous, whispering silence filled the room. On the front benches sat the notables of the town—men in clean, well-cut linen suits. General Blas Espina had invited them there, and they knew better than to stay away. The rest of the benches were filled with lesser folk—peons and small business men who had come of their own accord to see what sort of justice the General would dispense. He had occupied the town a month ago, and this was the first formal court of the new régime.

Behind the judge's desk sat the General himself. He was in uniform, and was flanked by a dozen officers.

But he seemed to be waiting for something. He looked at his watch; he toyed with a small ivory gavel. He watched the door which led to the street.

Finally a short, stocky silhouette appeared against the light. The General rose to his feet.

"Welcome, Herr Rittmeister," he said in excellent German. "We have been waiting for you. When I was studying at Göttingen before the war, I admired the German courts very much. So just they are, and so wise. Now you shall see how I give justice to my people."

Herr Rittmeister walked down the center aisle and took a reserved seat in the front row. He was a heavy man with small, deep-set eyes.

"I am greatly honored," he said. "We shall see."

The General waved his hand in a graceful gesture and addressed the courtroom in Spanish.

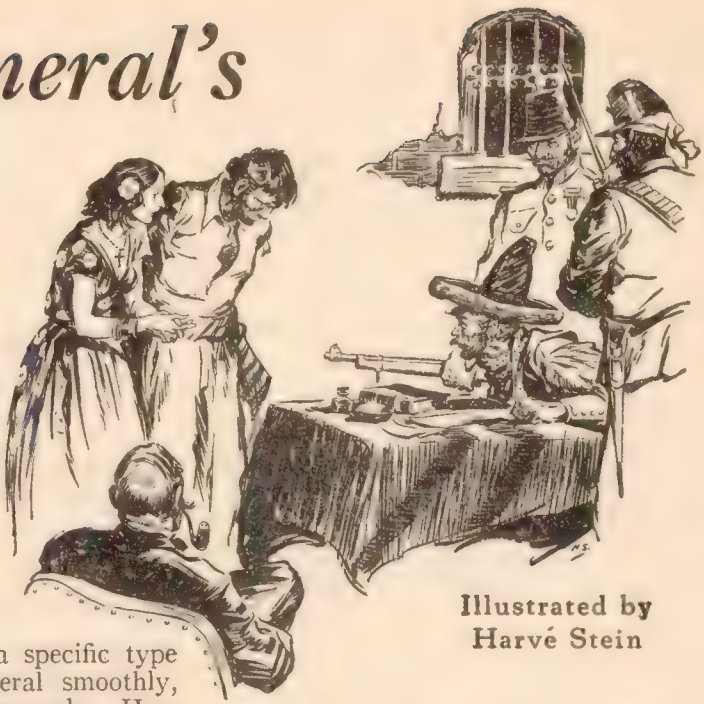
"This, my friends," he said, "is the first court to be held under my new government of freedom and justice. I have waited for the Señor Rittmeister. He is one of our leading industrialists—the owner of the Cuesta Grande silver mine. He has complained that criminal justice in San Jacinto is neither quick nor sure. So I invited him here to see for himself."

Rittmeister got heavily to his feet.

"I said a lot of valuable silver ore had been stolen from my mine. I want you to catch the robbers."

The General's Justice

By
GREGORIO SOMERS



Illustrated by Harvé Stein

"The way to prevent a specific type of crime," said the General smoothly, "is to punish all crime rigorously. How much ore have you lost, Señor Rittmeister?"

"At least a hundred kilograms—worth a thousand *reales*."

"That is a great deal," said the General. "I sympathize. Let us call the first case."

He waved his hand. Two soldiers advanced from the side of the room, leading between them a young, barefooted peon. He wore handcuffs. His feet were manacled together, the short chain clanking loudly across the stone floor. His dark, rather handsome face showed bewilderment and terror.

When he arrived before the desk, the General glared at him a moment through half-closed eyes. Then he took a dirty cloth bag from the floor beside his chair and placed it on the desk.

"Where did you get this?" he demanded.

The peon was struck dumb with fear.

"Answer!" cried the General.

Finally the peon found his tongue.

"I picked it up in the road," he stammered uncertainly, "by the little bridge near the Church of Jesus the Redeemer. It was lying there without an owner."

"A likely story! Valuable property doesn't look for an owner in the public street."

"I picked it up," murmured the peon desperately. "I am an honest man."

The General rose and looked down at the German in the front row.

"Now," he said, "I shall demonstrate the severity of my justice. Notice, Señor Rittmeister! No one has complained of theft. No one claims this property. But it is a type of property which no peon has a right to possess. That is sufficient evidence for this court. We shall discover the truth by direct, positive methods."

He motioned to one of the officers.

"Take the prisoner to the jail where his cries will not be heard. Apply that method which the Americans call so pleasantly 'the third degree.' Apply it strongly. Bring him back when he agrees to tell the truth, or don't bring him back at all."

The soldier seized the peon by the arms. He struggled in terror, protesting his innocence, pleading for mercy. The General looked away. The man in the front row watched the pitiful scene with an approving smile on his lips.

Then suddenly from the rear of the room came a high-pitched, agonized scream. Every head in the court turned around, and down the center aisle ran a pretty, barefooted peon girl in a red dress printed with yellow flowers. Her smooth black hair glistened softly like lacquered metal. Her lips were very red against her brown skin. Her eyes were wet with tears, and her young breast was moving with emotion.

"No, *no!*" she cried. "Don't torture him. He is my *novio*, my sweetheart.

Don't beat him! Don't cut him with knives! I did it. I am the robber."

The General leaned forward.

"What, Chiquita? *You* the robber! You don't look like a robber."

"I did it," cried the girl. "I made him do it."

"Why did you do that?"

"Oh, my General! I love him *so* much." She pressed her two little brown hands to her heart. "We want to get married. It is a pain in my heart—like a tiger eating my heart. And his too."

"But that is no reason to steal. Why *don't* you get married?"

"Ah, my General. I am a good girl. I was educated by the Sisters of Mary the Virgin. They tell me it is a mortal sin to live together without marriage. And the wedding costs ten *reales*. We have no money at all. So I told him to steal. I told him how to get into the mine, how to creep past the guards. I told him how to sell the ore he stole. I made him do it. I love him so much. And now you are going to torture him."

A MURMUR of sympathy passed over the courtroom. But Rittmeister sprang to his feet.

"Ore?" he cried loudly. "*Ore?* Is it ore they stole?"

"Yes," said the General. "It is ore. Look."

He lifted the cloth bag by the bottom and poured on the desk a small heap of dark, glistening mineral. Rittmeister picked up one of the largest lumps. He examined it closely. Then he glared savagely at the peon and the girl.

"This is *my* ore," he shouted. "It came from *my* mine. See! There are the markings. I know them like the palm of my hand. This lump came from the middle vein. It could come from no other place in all the world."

The girl began to weep loudly. The peon struggled forward and put his arm around her shoulders to comfort her.

"I demand the most severe punishment," shouted Rittmeister.

The General nodded regretfully.

"Yes," he agreed. "This is a crime not only against you, Señor Rittmeister, but against the State as well. Every ounce of silver which leaves this country has to pay a fifty-per-cent export tax. This is the principal revenue of the government. But stolen ore never pays a tax. It is smuggled out in small quantities, risking the penalty of confiscation and a heavy fine. The State suffers a great loss. It is necessary for the public good that this traffic be suppressed."

"That is right," said the German, nodding his head vigorously. "I lose my ore and the State loses too. Punish both these thieves."

The General pushed the ore toward the edge of the desk and dumped it into the cloth bag. He handed the bag to Rittmeister.

"You claim this?" he asked.

"Of course I do. It's mine. It's worth fifty *reales*."

"Take it, then," said the General. "I believe you."

He turned to the peon and the girl, still clinging together before the desk.

"And now," he said, "I shall pronounce sentence. I condemn you two to be married at once, and to live together the rest of your lives without quarrels or infidelities."

"What?" cried the German, his face turning an angry red. "You are letting them go? Is this justice? Is this the way to prevent crime?"

A slow smile spread over the General's face. He looked at the German with extreme amusement in his eyes.

"Yes, my friend," he said slowly. "This is exactly the way to prevent crime—especially the more important crimes." He pointed to the bag of ore in the German's hand. "That ore came from a ten-ton shipment which was found last night in a hut near the seacoast. It was waiting for a smuggler's boat to take it away. There was no one in the hut, so I could not discover at first what mine it came from. But I had my suspicions. You have confirmed them by claiming the ore."

THE German's face turned white. He gulped and stammered.

"The ore has been confiscated," continued the General. "You, Señor Rittmeister, are fined fifty thousand *reales*, plus costs."

The General looked down at the peon and the girl, who were smiling delightedly, very much pleased with themselves.

"The costs of the trial are ten *reales*," said the General. "These young people are friends of mine. They were both born on my father's hacienda. They have two children already, of course; but they would really like to be married in a legal way. The price of the ceremony is ten *reales*. That is the cost of this trial."

REAL EXPERIENCES

In this department we print each month a group of the best true stories contributed by our readers. (For details of this Real Experience contest, see page 3.) First a professional fighting-man tells of his lone raid on Puerto Mexico during the Vera Cruz affair. . . . Incidentally Major O'Reilly—the famous soldier of fortune whose experience with the Spanish Foreign Legion you read last month —says that he (O'Reilly) is a mere pink pacifist compared to Tracy Richardson, who has been wounded in battle seventeen times.

By TRACY RICHARDSON

A Battle off the Record

AN enterprising Yanqui salesman tried to sell some battleships to Diaz, President of the Republic of Mexico. In his suave manner Diaz answered his arguments:

"Señor, you are wasting your time and talents. Mexico has the finest navy in the world."

"What!" cried the astonished salesman. "Mexico has a navy? Where is it?"

"All over the world," answered President Diaz. "There," he added, pointing to a series of pictures adorning the walls of his office, "are our ships."

"Why," ejaculated the salesman, "that is the American navy!"

"And under the Monroe Doctrine, the Mexican navy," answered Diaz. . . .

But at the time of which I am writing, 1914, the American navy, or part of it, was lying in the harbor of Vera Cruz. A short time before, they had unlimbered their guns and bombarded the Naval Academy and the sand dunes back of the town; after which the sailors and marines landed and soon had the situation well in hand.

A foreign steamer had started part of the trouble by trying to land a cargo of arms and ammunition for the Huerta government, and had sailed for Puerto Mexico, where they had unloaded the arms unmolested.

I was "doing Intelligence" in Vera Cruz at the time; and some official got curious about what was going on down in Puerto Mexico. The trip was what they called a "dirty" job; and as I was not a regular, they handed the assignment to me. Entirely unofficial, of course, for we were not at war with the Republic of Mexico. But if some curious Yank should wander down that way, entirely on his own, and see things which he could report when he returned, why, that was just fine.

I picked a young Texas Mexican called "Cutsie" to go with me. He had been doing some work for Richard Harding Davis as interpreter, handy-man and all the thousand and one things Davis knew how to demand. Cutsie was tired of the job, and welcomed this trip.

ON our way south we followed the narrow-gauge railroad, traveling at night, hiding in the daytime, our only trouble the barking of stray dogs who did not like the smell of gringoes. Our going was easy but very slow. Our only armament was knife and pistol. We carried a small pack of food, flash-lights and field-glasses.

For a whole day we lay on a hill outside Puerto Mexico and studied the activities of the little port. The steamer in question was there; no cargo was being unloaded, but many boxes and trunks were being taken aboard. A fleet of small boats was patrolling the harbor.

Soldiers were everywhere. They patrolled the wharfs and the streets of the town, and had outposts on the railway. We could see machine-guns mounted on the roofs of the principal buildings. It looked as if they were expecting something to happen, though what it was, we could not imagine. Carranza forces were very active in the north; but there was no rebel activity in this part of the Republic that we knew of.

We had a good picture of conditions in Puerto Mexico, but there was a feeling that something was going on which did not appear on the surface. We decided to try to find out what was up.

TAKING advantage of the evening's activities, we made our way into the town. The streets were teeming with humanity. Sailors from the steamer were in all the cafés, but no other foreigners were to be seen.

Cutsie could pass unnoticed in any Mexican crowd. I was sunburned even blacker than he; and with a straw hat pulled down over my eyes, my white but very dirty pants and cheap shoes, I got by without trouble. When it was necessary to talk, I let Cutsie take the lead. We visited the *cantinas* and drank beer; but there was nothing in the conversations to explain the activity.

We wandered down to the dock and got a look at some of the boxes that were being taken aboard the ship. Several of them bore the mark, *"R.M."—Republic of Mexico.* Cutsie tried to open one of the boxes and nearly got shot for his trouble. As he ran, with the soldiers in hot pursuit, I joined him.

As we fled through the streets, a few shots were fired at us; and the shots and cries caused a crowd to join in the chase. No one knew what it was all about, but it was fun to chase some one, so they at least were having a good time. We dodged and doubled; but at every turn we ran into groups of soldiers and citizens.

We tried to mingle with the crowd, but were recognized and nearly caught. Some one threw a flower-pot from a veranda which caught Cutsie alongside the head. For a minute I thought he was done in. I grabbed him by the arm and ducked into a doorway. The door was unlatched, and we eased in. Apparently no one saw us, and for the moment we were safe.

The door through which we had entered opened into a passageway to a patio. The center was filled with flowers; but around the sides was a walk, really the living-room of the house. We could hear voices in conversation. Cutsie was all right again, so we crept closer to see who was in the patio.

Seated around a small table, not fifteen feet from us, were three foreign officers, in uniform. They were drinking cognac with two Mexicans in the uniform of the Federal army. Another man in civilian attire was acting as interpreter. They seemed to be in high good humor.

"We will be ready to sail as soon as our passengers arrive," were the words we first heard spoken by the interpreter.

"We will let you know just as soon as we receive word," answered one of the Mexicans. "They haven't left the capital yet; but hold yourself ready to sail on a moment's notice."

They stood up and drank a toast to some one whose name we did not catch. It looked as though the foreigners were leaving; and as Cutsie and I were crouched in the only exit, we had to move. The street outside was empty, so we walked boldly away. We could still hear shouting, and now and then shots, so we made our way to the only part of town that seemed quiet, the water-front.

WE avoided the docks where the baggage was piled, and went down the beach. Tied alongside a landing was a fair-sized gasoline launch, one of the boats we had seen patrolling the harbor during the day. Several other power-boats were anchored near, and some were beached above the tide.

"Know anything about boats?" I asked Cutsie.

"No; but I know how to run motors. . . . I get you, Tracy! It's a great idea. It'll be a lot nicer going back by boat than hoofing it all the way. Maybe when we get to Vera Cruz, we can sell the boat."

We examined the launch tied alongside the dock. Its tank was half full of gasoline, and there were several full five-gallon cans aboard. We searched the other boats and removed all extra fuel.

"Tracy, why not get away with all these boats? We could tie them together and tow them out to sea. If the load is too much, we can cut them loose; but anyway, they can't use them to chase us."

Knowing very little about boats myself, I agreed that it was not a bad idea. We rustled ropes, and after an hour's hard work had eight launches tied to-

gether and ready to go. When we tried to start the engine, our luck was perfect; it started at the first spin of the fly-wheel. But we had not figured on the noise it would make. With a roaring exhaust we pulled out. I stopped the boat while Cutsie fastened on the tow-rope. Once fast, we opened up and headed out to sea.

NOW we could hear the Mexicans yelling; shots began to whiz over our heads; then came a regular fusillade. We crouched low in the cockpit and opened the motor wide; but the speed, with all that drag from the tow, was mighty slow. We knew they did not have another boat for pursuit, so thought it safe to continue with our loot. We made a quarter of mile, and the shooting was general. Bullets were plunking into the boats with a regularity that was nerve-racking.

We were bucking an incoming tide, and it was all we could do to hold the boats head-out to sea. A machine-gun opened up on us, and we could hear the bullets tearing into a boat somewhere behind us. I yelled for Cutsie to cut the rope, let the rest of the boats go to blazes. Better to be satisfied with one boat and a safe getaway, than to be hogs and get caught or killed. Cutsie crawled to the stern of the boat and was poised with his knife raised, when there was a swishing roar, and a shell exploded in the water a few feet beyond the boat. Cutsie went overboard, and I gave him up as a "goner"; but in a matter of seconds he was sputtering alongside and yelling for me to give him a hand aboard.

"Lost my knife," he yelled. "Give me yours—we got to be getting out of here before they get mad."

Again he crawled to the end of the boat, and then the second shell came. We ducked with the explosion, and then stood up to see what had happened. The third boat in our tow was smashed; and before we could think properly, another shell tore through the nose of the second boat, throwing it around. The jerk threw me to one side, and I spun the wheel of our pilot-boat. The launch answered her helm perfectly and came around; but a wave of the incoming tide caught us, and the next thing we knew, we were battling in the water.

Shells continued to fall around us, but only scored one more hit. We were now hopelessly wrecked, and at the mercy of the tide. We hung on to the side of the overturned launch and cursed the fate that had made us so greedy as to want to run off with the entire navy. A searchlight was playing over the wreckage from the deck of the steamer, but we managed to keep out of its beam.

The next two hours seemed a lifetime as we slowly drifted in toward the shore. Neither of us were good enough swimmers to make a break for it and try swimming down-shore; yet we knew that once we were washed ashore, we would get short shrift from the troops. They would probably start shooting as soon as we were sighted.

We had one chance—one in a thousand, perhaps. With a word to Cutsie, I dived down and came up in under the launch. I worked my way to the cockpit and came up inside; and glory be, there was two feet of air-space there! With luck we could still beat the game.

Once more I dived and came up outside, where I told Cutsie my scheme: "We'll wait as long as possible, then go under, get in the air-pocket in the cockpit, and let things take their course."

Closer and closer we drifted in toward the beach. Fires were burning, and we could see the soldiers running up and down, but there was no more shooting. Then our feet touched the sandy bottom, and it was time to go under. Inside, it was close and hot; but we walked along, trying to steady the rolling of the boat as best we could. We could hear voices, faint and muffled, and then they were pounding on the bottom of the boat.

There came a larger wave than usual, and we were lifted with the boat and carried forward with a big sweep that ended up in a thump. The boat was grounded, and we were penned up inside. . . . For several hours we stayed there, as quiet as possible, until our breathing became hard and labored. For sometime we had not heard voices, so we decided to make a break for it. We had to dig a way through sand with our feet to get out, but it wasn't so hard as we had feared.

SLOWLY we came to the surface, afraid to look. All we could see was stars, and the reflection of dying fires on the beach. We rested for a few minutes, gulping in the fresh air, then waded down-shore until it was safe to land. We walked the beach and swam streams all the way back to Vera Cruz, where we reported that all was quiet and serene.

A short time later President Huerta sailed from Puerto Mexico aboard that same steamer—an exiled president.

Lions, Tigers, Horses—

"WISH you'd handle another act for me, Mabel," said the boss one day. "Just a little one."

I laughed. "Sure! Got some more wild beasts to subdue?"

He grinned. "Uh-huh! Goats!"

My face fell. "Goats! What do you take me for?"

"You'll be doing me a big favor, Mabel. We need a comedy act, and you're the girl can put it over."

"All right," I said reluctantly.

There was a large buck named Rabbit, and two nannies in the act. Rabbit and I disliked each other at first sight. Every time he jumped off the pony he rode, with a small monkey holding to his horns, he would try to butt me. The audience loved it, and the children nearly burst their sides laughing; but personally I couldn't see the comedy. The third afternoon I worked the act I got Rabbit off the pony and up on his stool. But as I turned to take my bow, Rabbit hit me square in the seat of my pants. I went flat on my face in the dirt. As I got up, he hit me again. This time I went head-first out of the ring and right in front of Sam. He picked me up, and dusted me off. "Some animal-trainer!"

I jerked away from him and ran from the tent, almost blubbering with anger. I ran squarely into the boss, who was standing at the entrance, doubled up with laughter.

"Wonderful, Mabel!" he gasped. "Do that every day and you get another raise."

I glared at him. "Mr. Barnes, you can get another goat-trainer. I'm quitting this show."

He trotted after me as I stalked toward the dressing-tent. "Say, listen, Mabel. I just heard today—a tramp steamer has docked at Dallas, Oregon, and they've a tiger aboard. Want to go with me and have a look at it when the show closes?"

"Do I?" I was radiant now. "Will you buy it, Boss?"

He nodded. "If you say so!"

I've broken and trained dozens of tigers, but I still remember the thrill of meeting Duchess, my first jungle-bred beast. She was a double-striped Himalayan and very dark. She would be magnificent working with King and Queen.

The captain greeted us with open arms. The tiger was still in the crate in which she had traveled from India. She fought the cage savagely and her eyes glared wildly at us as one of the men prodded her to her feet so we could see that her legs were all right. She struck again and again at the bars. Poor dear, she was half dead with terror!

The captain was glad to make a reasonable price to get the tiger off his hands. A runway was built, and a stationary cage placed near it. Then Duchess (as I named her) was released from her crate and shipped to the circus. And I got my first lesson in tiger-breaking.

For two weeks Duchess was sent down the runway and into the arena alone so she could get used to it.

"I'm going in with her today," I told Bert.

He shrugged. "All right. Just step inside the door. If she starts for you, jump out. I'll stand right behind you here in the safety-cage to get the door open."

Slowly I opened the door. Duchess turned and glared at me. Just as I got fully inside the arena, she raised her head. I started to call her, but Bert grabbed my arm.

"Quick—she's going to spring!"

He jerked me out and got the door shut just in time. She hit the door with such force that it knocked us both against the far side of the safety-cage. With a roar of rage she sprang for the top of the arena again and again.

But the second day following, I was able to step into the cage and talk to her a minute or two. For an entire month I repeated this routine, gradually taking a few steps farther from the door and closer to the tiger. I kept a pedestal in front of me and carried a buggy-whip in my hand.

Then I brought King into the arena with her. She was much quieter and seemed to gain confidence with him. I let the two of them roam around the cage for a while, then put King up on his seat. I placed another seat beside him and gradually coaxed Duchess on it.

"Good work," approved Bert from the safety-cage.

After a week or two I let Queen into the arena with the other two. Duchess

and Goats

Highlights in the career of a famous animal trainer, as told to Gertrude Orr—

By MABEL STARK

didn't care for this. She'd begun to take a personal interest in King, and resented having another female in the picture. She sprang at Queen with a snarl of jealousy. I brought the buggy-whip down on her nose. Quick as a flash she turned and struck at me. Her claw tore my knuckle, almost severing the finger.

"Get out of there quick," shouted Bert. "She'll kill you!"

"I'm all right," I said, hastily wrapping my handkerchief around my hand. "I can't let her think I'm afraid now."

I got her up on her seat beside King and put Queen in place. I kept them there a few minutes, then sent them one by one down the runway.

The doctor took six stitches to close up the wound. My first scar—a memento of Duchess, my first jungle-bred tiger!

The boss owned two fine thoroughbred stallions. One of the girl riders with the show asked me one morning if I'd like to go out with her. The horses were frisky. As we started back, I let my horse out. I was all right till we got to a gate. Instead of stopping, he jumped. His forefeet hit the top of the gate, and he turned a complete somersault, catching me under him and rolling on me. My head hit the frozen ground, and one of his hoofs struck just above my left eye.

When they got me to the hospital, they found my skull was fractured, three ribs were broken and the cords of my neck badly injured. I was unconscious seven days, but the ninth day I got back to quarters. My left eye was almost blind, and the cords of my neck were so weak that my head drooped to one side.

It was an effort to keep going, but the show was due to open and I was determined to put on my act now that Duchess was working like an old trouper.

DURING a matinee one afternoon at Leavenworth, Kansas, one of Bert's lions—trained to ride upon a horse—decided that he didn't like the feathers in my headdress. As he did a jump over my head, he struck out at them. His claw caught in my hair and cut a five-inch gash in the side of my head. It was the luckiest accident I ever had, for my eye immediately began to improve, and soon the double vision that had bothered me, cleared up. The doctor said there must have been clotted blood in a vein and the lion's claw had opened that vein.

Every day I rode in the cage with Sampson, Tom, Jerry and Brutus, the four male lions of Bert's act.

The streets were crowded, and the mounted police had a hard time keeping a way clear for us to get through. At one place the crowd broke bounds and gathered around my cage, staring at me as if I were a lion too, locked up there with the other four caged brutes. Just as the line started again, a farm horse, frightened by the scent of the lions, tried to run away. As he came abreast my wagon, he slipped and fell beneath the cage. Like a flash all four lions began leaping at the bars, trying to get at the horse, struggling frantically in a tangle of wheels and harness.

The lions, completely maddened and unable to reach the horse, turned on me. Brutus jumped first, grabbing me by the right leg and trying to pull me down. I clung to the iron partition of the cage, shouting at him and trying to keep him from dragging me to the center of the cage where the other three crouched. With a short piece of buggy-whip I always carried, I struck him on the nose; and he backed off, roaring, but not until he had torn open the calf of my leg.

The driver of the wagon, hearing the commotion, jumped down from his seat and with his whip got the other three lions back, but Brutus made another leap for me as I backed through the partition door into the little safety-cage. He caught my arms with his claws, tearing great gashes in each. If it hadn't been for Sampson, he would have killed me. The old lion with which I did the balloon act seemed to want to help me. Anyway, he stepped between Brutus and me as Brutus crouched for another spring, and I had time to fall back into the safety-cage and slam the door shut.

The people on the street were panic-stricken. Women were fainting, children screaming, and the men took to their heels or went for the nearest telegraph-pole.

Two men ran forward to help the driver, who broke the lock of the cage, got me into an auto and off to a hospital.

Machine-Gun Manners

An instructor in aërial gunnery becomes a target himself on three occasions.

By BOURKE LEE

SMITH was not his name, so I'll call him that. He was a most likable young naval flyer who was always striving to do things exactly right—and frequently failing in his endeavor. One of the things he never succeeded in teaching himself was that the business end of a machine-gun is something that you do not point at a friend under any circumstances. And over a period of years Smith was my personal menace.

The first time I became acquainted with Smith's loose tendencies with a machine-gun he was a student in the Navy's aërial gunnery school, where, as an upstart two-striper, I was officer-in-charge with the delightful assignment of telling highly senior brass hats which way was up.

Smith was in a firing-stand on the machine-gun range. He was being educated in stoppages and jams. His ammunition was faulty. His gun was doctored. Clad in helmet, goggles and big gloves, he stood in the blast of an airplane propeller trying to fire a string of shots against time, with a gun that wouldn't fire a burst of ten. Smith was getting the works. All student flyers got the works. It's the only way you can make an aërial gunner. But Smith was the first student to give his instructors the works.

Fifty feet behind the firing-line at a big cleaning-bench, I was trying to induct a group of student flyers into the proper cleaning of a machine-gun. As I demonstrated, I was suddenly and rudely interrupted by the arrival of a flock of .30-06 bullets. Splinters, gun-parts, cleaning-solution flew.

From my place in the dirt under the bench—a position which I had immediately assumed—I roared: "Cease Firing!" The cry was repeated down the firing-line. And when every gun was locked at safe, I crawled out from under my bench and made my hair lie down again.

Smith said: "My goggles fogged up. I shot in the wrong direction. It was the fog on my goggles."

I thought the fog was somewhere behind his goggles, and told him so as I gave him permission to leave the range, fast! But instead of kicking him out of his training-course, I dropped the matter.

Years later we met again on the west coast, Smith in one fighting plane squadron, myself in another. Neither of us ever mentioned the day his goggles had fogged. And when the annual gunnery exercises came around, Smith and I met several times in the air and burned a lot of ammunition at a common target, practicing, testing fixed guns, and the gear which timed the guns to fire between the propeller-blades.

There was considerable rivalry between Smith's squadron and mine; and so, to insure fairness, when one squadron fired its official record scores, the target was towed by the other squadron.

My turn came, and I took out the tow plane. A thousand feet behind me at the end of a stout tow-line the sleeve target ballooned out and sailed smoothly along three thousand feet above the Pacific. I watched the firing plane and umpiring plane take position astern of me; saw the firing plane dive upon the target and recover; and then heard the dull, long-delayed pound of the machine-gun. I reversed my direction, settled down for the second run, and no longer watched the planes behind me.

I NEVER heard the sound of the gun on that second run. Something caught up with me well in advance of any sound of gunfire. It was a long burst that beat my ship like a heavy, rapid hammer. The rear spar of the center wing section in front of me and just above my head melted away in splinters, and long rips ran through the fabric. I cut the target loose and dived: I wanted away from there.

Back at the field my irate investigation uncovered the firing pilot. Smith? Right!

"I suppose you had an automatic fire," I said sarcastically. "The gun just started shooting all by itself, and you couldn't shut it off, so you shut your eyes instead, and hoped for the best!"

"I don't understand it," he said, greatly worried. "I had that sleeve just right in my sight, and the range was just right, and my position in my approach was just right, and the gun worked fine all through a fine long burst. But instead of hitting the target, I hit your plane."

"Um." I said. "Either you or the optical sight is cockeyed; and I've yet to see a cockeyed optical sight." And then I thought of something. "Did you bore-sight that gun before you went out?"

"Oh," said Smith. "No. I thought the gunnery gang did that."

"You *thought!* With what? Let's check that ship now."

AT the butts we rigged up the tail of Smith's plane, centered the bore of the fixed gun on the bore-sighting target, and then I tried to find the same target in the sight. It wasn't there.

"You see?" I asked. "You might hit the Pacific Ocean with that sight—but nothing smaller. Line that sight up."

"I don't understand why I always do these dumb things to you," Smith said. "This is the second. I wonder what I'll do to you next?"

"There aint going to be any next!" I said firmly. "All you've got to remember is this: Never take anything about a machine-gun for granted! Check it yourself!"

"Yes," he admitted. "That is true."

Just how true it was we were both to discover not so many years later when Smith and I were serving in the same squadron. Our outfit had a temporary base in a cow-pasture on the windward shore of the island of Oahu. Again we were busy with aërial gunnery. Our fixed guns were Vickers; our mechanical interrupter gear was already obsolete, and not up to its duty of spacing bullets, so that they did not shoot the propeller off the plane on which the gun was mounted.

As gunnery officer, I acquired gray hairs and a vocabulary that might help your golf.

Smith ran up to me one day. His gun-gear had blown up. How about a couple of gunner's mates? Of course he was in a hurry. We all were. Rush, rush, rush! I ran out with Smith to his plane.

"The gun is unloaded," Smith said as I climbed up on a wheel to look down in the vee of the engine at the synchronizing gear.

"What?" I asked.

"I said the gun is unloaded. I've been working on it for half an hour."

So I went to work with my head a few feet ahead of and directly in line with the muzzle of the Vickers. For several moments I was busy there, and then I raised my head to ease my neck as I took up some slack in the gun-gear.

As I lifted my head, a cannon went off in my ear, and the muzzle blast of the Vickers blew me off the wheel on which I was perched.

Smith ran to me as I picked myself up.

"Did I hit you? Did I hit you?"

My head was ringing like a bell. I could see Smith through a red mist of rage. I took a lot of long breaths and waited for the bell in my head to stop ringing. When it did, I was astonished at the way air was whistling in and out through my broken eardrums. But Smith was not the object of my anger.

I was an aërial gunnery expert. Letters from the Secretary of the Navy said so. I was the author of the Navy's bible on aërial gunnery. For years I had been telling my juniors and seniors all about aërial gunnery. Had I not looked down from the superior heights of experience upon this same Smith and wisely told him: "Never take anything about a machine-gun for granted. Check it yourself!"

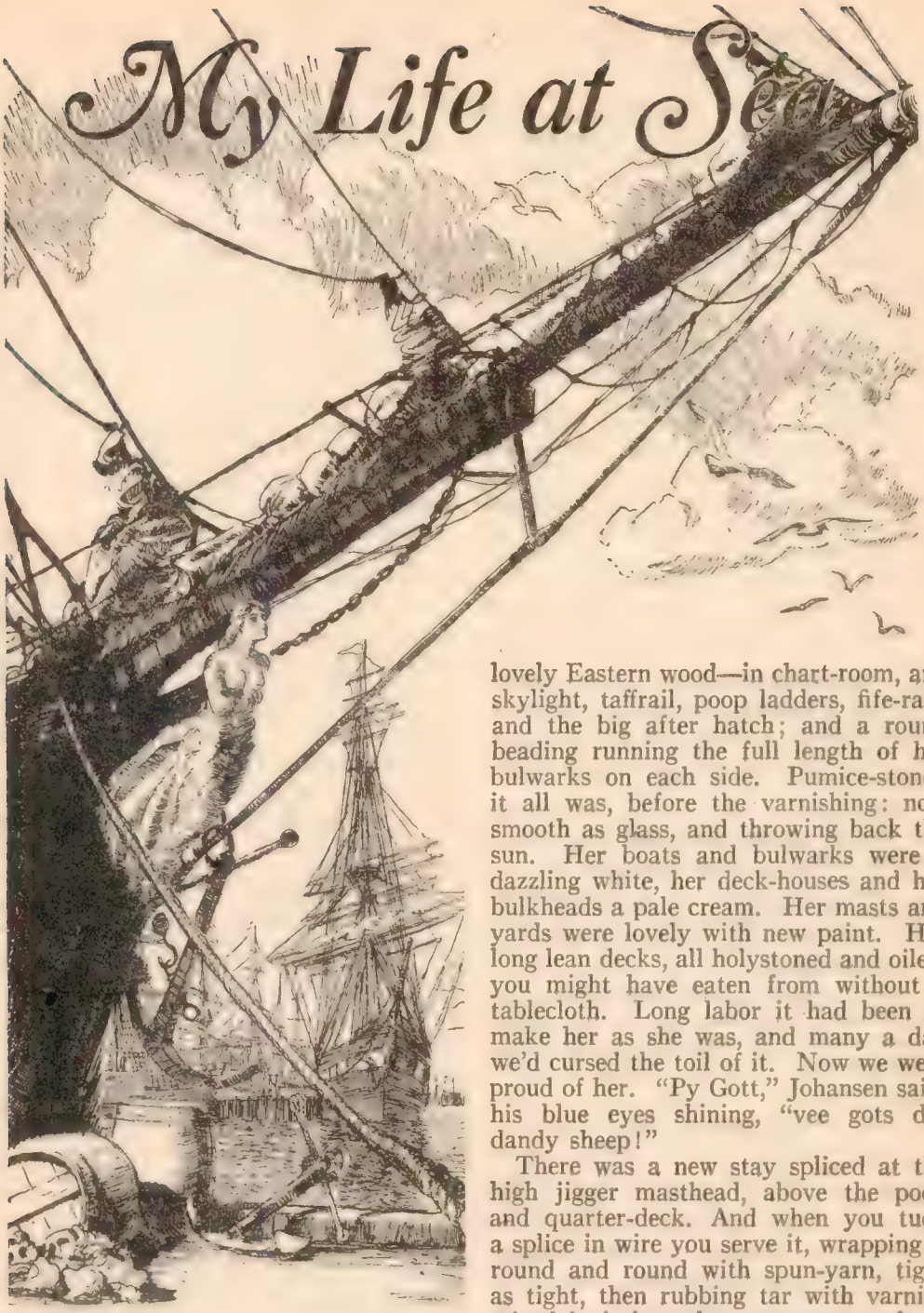
And now I had just gone to work directly in front of a machine-gun, certain that the gun was unloaded because somebody else had said so!

There is nothing more to be said.

SMITH bore the brunt of my stupidity. He was detached from the single-seater fighting planes he loved, and sent to an air base. And there, probably trying harder than ever to do things exactly right, he brought a plane in to a landing directly on top of another plane, in which his commanding officer was taking off. I don't know where Smith went from there.

Smith was very likable. And he did try so hard! I am reminded of him whenever I see an earnest automobile driver come down the avenue trying hard to drive exactly right, so intent upon his driving that he booms right through a red light.

My Life at Sea



DAWN opened swift, bursting its banners out. The sea, no longer deep-sea blue, gleamed emerald. To any coming from the shore it would have seemed blue water. But we knew blue where real blue seas roll by, mid-ocean's blue.

Our ship shone in beauty. Her brass-work flashed and glittered in the sun; her teak-work gleamed, with two fresh coats of varnish. There was a lot of that most lovely Eastern wood—in chart-room, and skylight, taffrail, poop ladders, fife-rails and the big after hatch; and a round beading running the full length of her bulwarks on each side. Pumice-stoned it all was, before the varnishing: now smooth as glass, and throwing back the sun. Her boats and bulwarks were a dazzling white, her deck-houses and her bulkheads a pale cream. Her masts and yards were lovely with new paint. Her long lean decks, all holystoned and oiled, you might have eaten from without a tablecloth. Long labor it had been to make her as she was, and many a day we'd cursed the toil of it. Now we were proud of her. "Py Gott," Johansen said, his blue eyes shining, "vee gots der dandy sheep!"

There was a new stay spliced at the high jigger masthead, above the poop and quarter-deck. And when you tuck a splice in wire you serve it, wrapping it round and round with spun-yarn, tight as tight, then rubbing tar with varnish mixed in it into the spun-yarn, to keep the moisture out and save the splice from rusting.

"Johansen," said the mate, "go get a tar-pot. Hop up aloft and tar that splice. That's the last touch to finish her." And up Johansen went, a tar-pot in his hand. There is no rigging on a jigger mast high up. You have to swarm, your legs about the mast. And she was rolling quite a bit, and pitching to a long, slow ocean swell. And somehow, as she

A great writer tells his own story. . . . Port at last after a stormy voyage—then out to sea and around Cape Stiff again.

By BILL ADAMS

took an extra sharp deep pitch, Johansen clinging there—holding with toenails and eyelashes, as we sailors say—let the tar-pot fall. And down it came, now upside down, now right side up, and landed on the white poop deck. And everywhere, on teak and paint and boats and bulwarks, were a myriad little spots of utter black.

MacDonald roared his wrath. The Old Man, his eyes the eyes of some old savage shark, said: *"My God!"*

Everyone was called on deck, men and apprentices, carpenter, sailmaker and even the steward. There was no four-hour watch below for anyone that day. All day we scrubbed and scoured. And had Johansen killed his father and his mother, wife and babies, in a drunken fit, he'd not have looked more desolate. By night we had her as she'd been at dawn, and all was well again. "Tomorrow we'll be in," we said, and our eyes shone. Only Johansen sat and brooded. His comrades in the forecastle could not cheer him. . . .

At dawn next day a tugboat picked us up off Flattery, to take us up the straits of Juan de Fuca. The order came to take all sail off her and send it down. And I went up aloft. On either side the forest grew down to the water's edge. That strait was as a road to Paradise, for beauty. Yet I scarce saw it. For now I had, and worse than ever yet, that vertigo. I shook and trembled. All up the long Pacific I had fought it. And here was I, and all my fighting it no use at all. *I'd never make a sailor!* It ruined coming in to my first port.

A Saturday it was we moored the ship. We had her moored by dusk. And then the Old Man sent for us apprentices, and gave us each a dollar from our premium money. And off we went ashore, all dressed in our shore uniforms. The shore folk stared at us, so brown we were, so bright of eye, so happy-seeming. Into a restaurant we went, and gathered at a table. A snow-white table-cloth, and napkins! Glasses, in place of dented rusty tin pannikins! A waitress came to take our order.

"Ham and eggs for three on one plate," said Hickley.

"Sir?" said the waitress.

"Ham and eggs for three on one plate," he repeated.

And she said, "Sir?" again. "I don't understand, sir."

"Well, then," said Hickley, "bring me three servings of ham and eggs, all at once, on one plate, and bring the same for every one of us."

And how those shore folk stared! When we came back aboard that first night we had no money left. There'd be no more till Saturday came again. . . .

There was a night when Glynn and I were ashore alone together. He said: "You're a good shipmate, Bill!" *Shipmate!* He was the first chum ever I had had. . . . *Oh, sailor, sailor, sailor!*

At last a day came when the ship's wide holds were empty. They yawned cavernous. Soon now we'd go round to the Fraser River to load for Liverpool. A tug-boat took us from the wharf. We dropped the anchor, and rested out in the quiet harbor, waiting.

GLYNN and I were by the main hatch one morning. I mind we were jesting about some little thing, his face all merry fun. MacDonald passed. "Get down below, you boys! Take brooms and sweep the hold out. No loafing, now!" Then he went on.

Glynn said: "Slip into the half-deck, Bill, and get some smokes. No one'll catch us in the hold." So I went into the half-deck, and he below. And as I stepped back to the deck, I heard the order to get the gig away; the Old Man was going ashore. I ran to help, not eager for the hold. A ship's hold is a dim-lit shadowy musty place. From it you cannot see the shore or anything.

Then, with the gig gone, I started forward to go down the hatch where Glynn had gone. I met Douglas running, and his face was white. "What's up?" I asked.

And Douglas said: "Glynn's killed."

I raced to the hatch, dropped down the ladder to the hold. And lying outstretched on the floor of the lower hold was Glynn, a red trickle at the corners of his mouth and at his nostrils. He'd stumbled in the dimness and had fallen from the between-decks to the lower hold. Sixteen feet—only sixteen feet!

The mate came down, and others. We lifted him. I bore his drooping head. His blood reddened my hands, red blood of my first chum.

Next day we were his pallbearers. We buried him in a shore cemetery, with pines about it. A little wind went soughing through the pines. Our Old Man was there, and his wife. Just those two, and we his apprentice comrades. Only Wood was not there. He sat alone, and shivered in the empty half-deck, his face ghostly white.

THE fishing village where we went to load was a dismal place. A collection of unpainted wooden huts, and shacks built of old coal-oil cans all rust-covered. We moored the ship beside a salmon cannery. At low tide enormous heaps of decaying fish offal were exposed beneath the cannery floor. We ate and slept in the reek of it.

Long wooden chutes were run from the wharf down into the ship's holds, and down them all day long slid salmon cases in a ceaseless stream. Always there were two apprentices in the hold, to nail up any cases that jumped the chutes and broke. And always, when a case was broken, we, ere we nailed it up, took out a can or two and hid them beneath our jumpers; and when no mate was about, slipped up and hid them in the half-deck.

On Sundays we wandered about the island. One Sunday, "Polly" Thompson and I came to a farm where apple trees stood in a row before the house. A gray-haired woman opened the door at my rap. We asked for an apple, and she sat us in her parlor, brought tea, bread and butter, and jam. Watching us eating, she seemed doleful, very. And when we rose to go and I thanked her, she ran at me, and flung her arms around me, and kissed my cheek. She said, tears on her withered face: "I had a son who was a sailor. We never knew what happened to his ship."

Beyond the village was a little church. Old Donaldson, the minister, came to the ship sometimes with a big basket filled with vegetables. A shy old chap, he gave them to the cook, then hurried off with no word to any of us. When Sunday came, we went to church at evening, just to show we liked his vegetables; just by way of thanks. We crowded in the back pew, now shy ourselves; but at the end of the service, when he had preached a sermon we didn't listen to, he gave out a hymn. And his congregation, a few women and children, turned to stare at us, none of them singing that hymn. For that was our hymn—we made the rafters ring!

Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
Who bidst the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep—
Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea.

Then we slipped quietly out. . . .

All through the voyage we'd laughed at One-eye—rubbing his horny hands together when the winds were light, saying, "More days, more dollars. I'm goin' to save me payday." Even down off the Horn he never had complained. He knew full well that soon he'd be too old for seafaring, and wanted to save toward his old age.

We didn't see old One-eye when we came aboard late one night—we'd given a minstrel-show in the town and had had a great time, singing. Next morning we slept late. But while we washed the decks down that forenoon, the cook came from his galley to throw some refuse to the river. He called the mate. A cap was floating, down beneath the gangway. Later some fishermen brought grappling hooks. They fished One-eye up, his face bloated. In each pocket was a bottle.

It was a Saturday night that the stevedores completed her loading. New sailors came to take the places of those who had deserted, and save for Thompson and myself all hands were busy getting sail aloft. On Sunday they were busy too; and I had to help. I had not been aloft in many weeks, and the vertigo came back, bad as ever. I hid it somehow. Wood was kept on deck, to slack the ropes away as needed. Lord, how I envied him! I thought of Furst and laughing Glynn. Evening came and I was still alive. We went to church, and sang "*Eternal Father Strong to Save,*" and put the forty-seven dollars we had taken in at our minstrel-show, into the plate. Donaldson asked God to bless us, and keep us safe upon the rolling sea. And I wondered would I ever be able to conquer that awful dizziness that came on me aloft.

A tug-boat came to take us out next day. Another ship that had come in, the *City of Benares,* gave us three cheers, and we gave her three back. And both ships beat their bells. A crowd of cannery hands and fishermen to wave us farewell. . . .

Salmon's what I remember best of that voyage home. Salmon and vertigo. We ate salmon three times a day, and never touched the ship's hard fare, unless to nibble hardtack now and then. So I had no complaint about the grub. But I had that dizziness aloft, as bad as ever. How would I ever be a sailor? When Glynn was living, though he never spoke of it, I thought sometimes he was aware of my trouble. And having him for my dear chum had helped a lot. Now there was no one. All of us were chums, but he had been my one dear closest one. I managed well enough upon the lower yards, the foresail, mainsail, crossjack. They were but fifty feet or so above the deck. The topsails were troublesome. But when I had to go above the cross-trees, that was hell. And the royals were my horror.

There came a sunny day when I was at the wheel. A bowhead whale appeared beside the ship—a monster. He swam so close that I could have dropped my hat on him. He'd dive, come up the other side, and dive again to come up where he'd been. The bright sea was all sun. There was no cloud at all except the fleecy rim of tender little clouds that ever hangs all round the wide horizon where the trade winds blow. The sun dipped low. The gentle white-caps tossed their snowy heads. I was alone, no one upon the poop, as I steered a fairy ship along a fairy sea, watched by a mythical monster. Happy? Yes, save that when upgazing to the royal, high above, I would remember that vertigo.

The sunset flame gave way to sapphire tints. The darkness fell. Stars winked. And soon a voice cried: "Light ahead, sir!" And as we veered a little from our course, and brought the light abeam, a sailor asked: "By the Lord, d'ye smell them pineapples?" Another said: "Aye. And I smells oranges too, and bananas."

High up above the sea, upon the island's ridge, the light flared toward the stars: a signal bonfire to let us know that we were seen. We stopped the ship and let her ride erect on that warm scenty sea. Soon we heard voices singing, and the *clunka-clunka* of long oars.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee!
Let the water and the blood
From Thy riven side that flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Save me from its guilt and power—

And then two whaleboats swung in alongside the ship and we were gazing down into the upturned faces of the sons of mutiny—the Pitcairn Islanders, who were come off with both boats loaded to the gunwale with fruits to trade. Soft-spoken, very gentle men, they swarmed up to the deck. They asked for linen sheets, and pillow-cases, for their women-folk. They asked for scented soap. We had not those, but what we had they traded liberally for. And if they'd hear a sailor curse, they'd say, "Oh, sir!" or "Please, sir!" Out on the deck I heard MacDonald say, "They're Jesus-lovin', aint they?" When in an hour the order came that they must go, my bunk was piled with pineapples, green coconuts, oranges, mummie apples, and bunches of bananas. I'd scarce a rag of clothing left save what I stood in. My sea-chest was nigh empty. I had more fruit than anyone in the half-deck. A lot I cared that Cape Stiff lay ahead!

Then we swung west next day, and took the west wind on our quarter. Turning the wheel over to me, the helmsman said: "Sou'-east—for the Horn, son." And then in a few days the mad Horn gales were yelling after her. But this was summer-time—December. Daylight till ten o'clock, and light again soon after one in the morning. We shortened sail to six topsails and the foresail and let her run like that. And how she ran! In those vast troughs she looked no larger than a walnut shell. And roaring up astern, their crests long miles of wind-flung flying foam, the mighty rollers cut all wind from out her topsails. Eighty feet from the deck her topsails were. And lying in the troughs, her topsails hung flat on her masts for just a moment. Then as she rose, the whooping wind would smite her, and we could feel her lift, jerked forward bodily; all her own weight and the three thousand tons of cargo in her hold—jerked forward in a rush by just the topsails. MacDonald shouted: "The Liverpool girls have got hold of the tow-line!" And I, with few clothes, shivered and shook. All one long day we sailed through ice, and all that day all hands were kept on deck. Berg after berg rolled by.

WOOD was forever mute. He had to go aloft again now, on the homeward passage. MacDonald didn't spare him. One sailor shirks, another must do the thing he leaves undone. I mind a day

when we were past the Horn and piling sail on her. There was another homebound ship in sight, and we were racing her. MacDonald shouted: "Hop up there, Wood! Loose that mizzen royal!" The ship was surging through a noisy sea, and rolling hard. The Old Man, on the poop, watched the rival ship. Wood started up toward the swaying spar a hundred and seventy feet from the deck. He went halfway and stopped. "Get up, dommit!" bawled MacDonald. He went a little way, and stopped again. And then, despite MacDonald's curses, he started down. He came down slowly. MacDonald waited for him, beside the rail. He lowered himself gingerly from the rigging to the deck. "Well, wot t'ell —Gawd, wot d'ye mean, eh?" began MacDonald savagely. Wood looked him full in the face, and with a crazy grin upon his lips, clapped his hands together and started jumping up and down on both feet.

"By Gawd! The lubber's loonie!" said MacDonald.

AND so he was. His mind had broken. Wood was made mad by horror of the rolling spars. It wasn't nice to see. Yet he was harmless, and so did not have to have the irons put on. There was some talk of that at first. And from that day he never worked at all: just wandered here and there about the ship, and sometimes stopped to clap his hands and do that crazy jumping up and down. He still ate salmon. So did Hickley and I.

It was a few days after Wood lost his reason that the mate called to me: "Hop up and loose that fore royal!" And up I started to the spar whence Furst had fallen. I reached it somehow. I mind how far, far, far away the narrow deck looked from the rolling spar. I mind that sea and sky shone dazzlingly. And that is all I mind, save that my limbs all shook; and that I seemed to hear Furst's falling scream. I don't know how I loosed the sail. I did, though. And I came down again. Sailor? How would I ever be a *sailor?* And yet the sea held me in thrall.

We came in at last, and let the anchor drop down to the Mersey mud. Wood's father came. Wood looked at him and grinned and clapped his hands, and jumped up and down, and did not know him. Wood's father took him off ashore. 'Twas better in the half-deck with the madman gone.

Next day we docked, and I took train for Ross. It was eleven at night when I came back to High House and to Aunt Polly, who wept as she embraced me.

I stayed late abed next morning, you can bet. Linen sheets in place of moldering blankets. Ah, luxury!

When another morning came I set out for Hereford, eleven miles away, on my old bicycle. The village was too still. I had to move. There was a restlessness upon me.

And as I rode through High Town, round four o'clock or so, thinking I'd best start home, I passed two girls. I'd never thought of girls. They'd been just girls. I'd never kissed a girl. You think that funny, eh, and me nineteen? Think what you please. It's fact. And now I saw a girl who smiled to me. A smile half shy. I see her yet. A lot of soft brown hair, and soft gray eyes. She had a bow of pale blue ribbon on her hat. And I was six foot three, and wore a sea apprentice uniform, and had, maybe, a slightly roving eye.

Her name, I soon found out, was Annie.

Almost three weeks I was in Peterstowe, and every blessed day I rode to Hereford. . . . Then there came a letter from my owner saying, "Join ship on such and such a day." It was the day after the morrow. Annie cried that night. I see her yet, upon the station platform, tears on her pretty cheeks. She'd given me a photograph, and on my wrist I wore a silver bangle she had put there. I watched her waving till my train went round a bend. And then—I was a sailor. Who would be in the half-deck now in place of Glynn, I wondered, and of Wood? The previous night, ere I came in from Hereford, I'd been down to the churchyard. I'd stood there a little while. *"You'll find it a hard life, my son,"* my father had said. And hard it surely was. Those awful swaying spars! But standing by that grave, I did not think of them. I should have been ashamed to own my fear to him.

IT was pitch dark when I came aboard. A light shone in the half-deck, and on the mainmast a few feet from the door. I saw that great steel mast uptowering to the night. And fear came over me. I put it away, went in and asked the question a sailor always asks: "Where are we bound this voyage?" We all had hoped to go out to the Colonies, or maybe to Calcutta, or perhaps to China. Sailors call Australia the Colonies.

"Portland, Oregon," they told me. Cape Horn again—and in the winter!

"Polly" was there, and the Chinaman, and Douglas. Hickley was to be third mate, share the second's cabin and eat at the saloon table. Parford had transferred to our sister ship just in from China. Tattersall, one of her apprentices, had traded with him. There was a tousle-headed young first voyager with questioning blue eyes, an Irish lad, O'Brien. There was a fat lad who reminded me of cows and pigs. He was a farmer's son. And there was a lad with thick curly black hair and very deep blue eyes that looked right into mine. And seeing him, I knew at once I'd found a chum. Later he told me that he had felt the same, the moment he saw me.

NEXT morning we tumbled out at the usual time, five o'clock. Both mates were new. The second was a fellow with a face just like a rat's. We didn't judge him smart enough for our ship. He irritated us. He had no pride in ships.

We sailed next morning. The same old song and dance. And I had a most happy feeling, for I felt at home. I put away my fear of the tall swaying spars, and loved the ship and loved the sea. And loosing sail, I managed well enough. The dizziness was there, but yet I managed. Maybe I'd conquer it upon the long wet road to Oregon. And what if not? Of that I didn't think.

Bond was my new chum's name—Paddy Bond. Irish he was, from Dublin. He seemed a quiet sort. We passed only a word or two on that first day, but every word we spoke seemed to draw us together.

One day soon after sailing, while I was hauling on a rope beside the jigger mast, the Old Man saw upon my wrist the silver bangle Annie had given me.

"You, boy! What's that rubbish you're wearing?"

I said: "It's a lucky sign, sir. It will bring us fair winds to Portland."

The Old Man scowled at me, but said nothing.

Maybe it was my bangle, maybe not. We ran, and ran, and ran, with bully breezes driving the old ship along. We crossed the Line in less than twenty days.

Being an old hand now, I did less of brass polishing and scouring of rust. The new lads did all that. I worked aloft with one or other of the sailors, repairing rigging, learning to splice and knot, and all the thousand little tricks that go to make a sailor. The height horror was there—at times most terrible; at others not so bad.

In fifty-three days we came to the pitch of the Horn. Ice on the shrouds, seas crashing over the decks and deck houses. Toil, toil, toil. Clothing all sea-soaked. Hungry all the time. Sheer misery. But we had fair luck and spent but eleven days battling the hurricanes. And then one day when past the Horn, we lay all day in a flat calm. Dark sky, dark sea. No break at all, in all the sea or sky's monotony. And then toward dusk we saw all of a sudden in the far south a white edge in the sky; and under it a white line on the ocean.

"All hands shorten sail!" We had not got the royals furled when the buster smote her—a "southerly buster" straight from the South Pole. Sails ballooned; the ship began to roll; the skipper shouted orders. And we got sail off her without losing one, and then we let her ramble, with only her big foresail and six topsails set. She rolled her railings under in quick succession, flooded her whole deck's length. Two men stood at her wheel. No one man could hold her. And when the morning came, I was the weather helmsman, the old ship in my keeping. The wheel tore my arms well nigh from out their sockets. You don't look up when you are steering ships in that weather. You keep your eyes glued on your rolling compass. Snow squalls yelled by, hiding the world away. And then they'd clear and all the barbarous sea would shine and sparkle; with here and there a glint of sun from some cloud rift. But once, when all the sea was clear, I did glance up, for just an eyelid's flicker. And right ahead, maybe a mile away, there lay another ship, her bow brought to the gale to ride it out. Some ships don't dare to run before the sort of wind that wind was. And I had but just seen her when a snow-squall came, and hid her quite. I yelled. The Old Man ran from the chart-room to my side.

"A ship hove to, dead ahead, sir!" I yelled.

WE could do nothing. You cannot alter a ship's course when she is running before such a gale as that gale was. Try to, and she will get away from you; and that's her finish. So it was hit or miss. The Old Man stood beside me, silent,

grim. And then just for a tick I lifted an eye-corner. And there, just for a tick, she was—that hove-to ship. I saw her headsails and a man upon her forecastle head. I could not see her length for whirling snowflakes. And she was scending—lifting her sharp bow to a high swell. And we were at that moment rolling—rolling away from her. Her boom end missed our rigging by a few feet only. Then she was gone astern, and all was well. Had she, instead of scending, been pitching, diving her sharp bow down, and had we rolled toward instead of from her—well, I'd not be sitting here to tell of it. I mind her name; I saw it on her bow: *Varona.*

FOR two full days and nights the buster raged, and then we picked up a brave wind from the westerly, and off we went, with all sail set. We never had to take a sail off her till we were come far north of the Line, beyond the region of the northeast trade wind. We were going to make a record run, and everyone was gay.

Even the Old Man's eyes shone. He came to me one day where I stood splicing a rope on the poop. He looked at the silver bangle I wore upon my wrist, and grinned.

And then one evening came the booby birds, those simple silly birds that, alone of all the sea-birds, will settle on a ship. They settled on her spars in scores—big birds with plumage white and brown. Sailors don't like them much, because when morning comes the decks are spattered. But no man harms a sea-bird. Or I, at least, have never seen one harmed. But while we all sat yarning on the hatch, that farmer's son went up aloft, unseen by anyone. The wind was blowing fair, and the old ship was running through a singing sea. And we were happy, very. A record run! We'd show our sister clippers something this voyage! And then we saw the farmer's son come down, and in his hand he had a dead booby.

"You damned young fool, what did you kill it for?" we asked angrily. He said he'd skin it for his sister. Polly said: "Damn your sister!" And right then, before he had begun to skin the bird, the mate cried: "Lee fore brace!" The wind was shifting. We trimmed the sails, and sat to yarn again. And then again the mate cried, "Lee fore brace!" And ere the dark came, the ship was off her course, the wind from dead ahead. That damned young farmer's son had brought us evil luck. We cursed him. We would have kicked him too, but chose a bitterer punishment. We put him to Coventry. No one spoke to him. And did he speak, no one would answer. That's hard when you are in a ship at sea. It cuts a man. It makes him a pariah. . . .

We came to Oregon in a hundred and ten days. It would have been in something more than ninety, but for that damned young lubber. We'd made the fastest passage of the year; but not a record.

In from our sea we came, and came to paradise. All one long lovely day we towed up the Columbia, often the pines so close that their green foliage brushed our yardarms. Above, a crystal sky; below, a wide calm river. And of course, the ship was dazzling—no speck of rust or dirt. We sent her sails down, stowed them in their locker. Working aloft, I plucked a sprig of foliage from a tree. The height horror was not there at all that day. And working by me, Paddy sang that song he always sang at dog-watch time. A song called "Paradise Alley." I'd found a chum, and I was very happy.

LETTERS had come aboard at Astoria, and on the way up-river the Old Man sent them to the half-deck.

I had one from Aunt Polly. She had left Peterstowe—rented High House and had moved as far away as she could get without going out of England. To some place I'd never heard of—in Cornwall. She'd moved to keep me from Annie, when I came home again! Why, I'd not thought of Annie, since I don't know when.

In our last port there'd been no other ship save the *Benares.* But come to Portland, we saw a spar forest—ship after ship.

I even mind their names, and they are music to me, as to any sailor. Listen then—*Euphrosyne, Lady Isobel, Eurydice, Cambrian Chief, Melanope.* You've never heard the beating of ships' bells, nor seen their signal flags a-flutter on a high sea wind. The loveliest things that by the grace of God's good hand the hand of man has ever fashioned. . . . And now they are all gone—and steamers have our sea.

Even more fascinating are the chapters of Mr. Adams' story which will appear in our forthcoming February issue.

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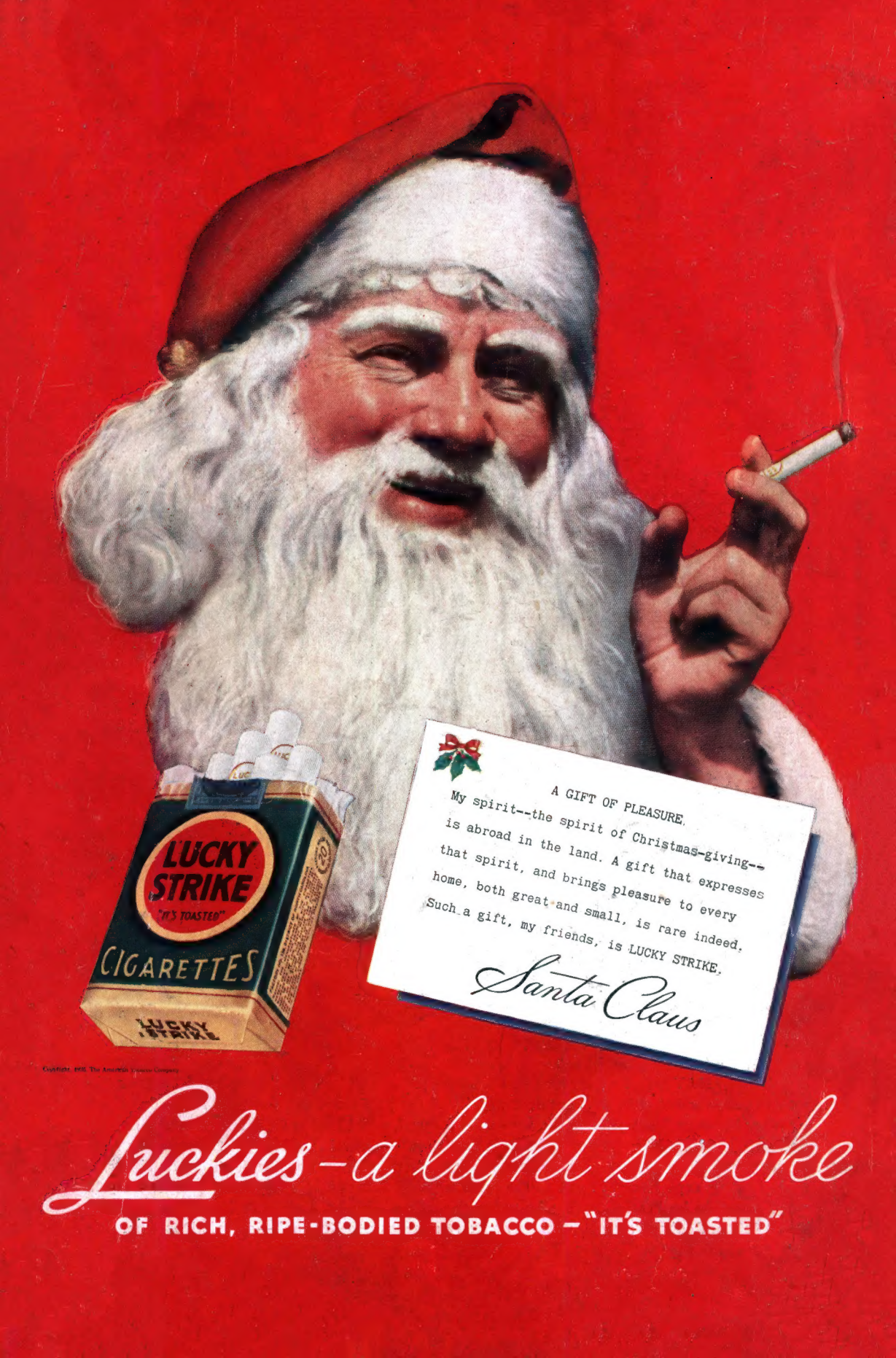
LUCKY STRIKE
"IT'S TOASTED"
CIGARETTES
LUCKY STRIKE
A GIFT OF PLEASURE.
My spirit--the spirit of Christmas-giving--
is abroad in the land. A gift that expresses
that spirit, and brings pleasure to every
home, both great and small, is rare indeed.
Such a gift, my friends, is LUCKY STRIKE.
Santa Claus

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Luckies—a light smoke

OF RICH, RIPE-BODIED TOBACCO—"IT'S TOASTED"